

S E R M O N S

ON

V A R I O U S

S U B J E C T S.

BY THE LATE

REV. BENJAMIN CHOYCE SOWDEN,

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AND

MINISTER of the English Episcopal Church at AMSTERDAM.



• BATH •

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## P R E F A C E.

**T**HE Editor of these Discourses has already informed the Publick, that they had not been prepared for the Press by the estimable Author. It does not even appear that they were composed with any farther views, than the instruction and edification of the Audience to which they were delivered. It is hoped that similar purposes will be answered with respect to those, who shall read them. The Author, had his life been prolonged, would probably have given to them, and to a very considerable number of others which still remain in the Family, a higher degree of polish, as we live in times, when style is cultivated with a peculiar and, perhaps, exaggerated solicitude. Of this he



## P R E F A C E.

was, undoubtedly, capable. It is well known how much he was esteemed by the Professors and Men of Letters at Amsterdam, not only on account of his moral and social qualities, but also of his knowledge, taste and genius : and it is much to be regretted, that he did not live to execute the design he had formed of publishing an English Translation of the most interesting Dissertations, which obtained the Prizes proposed by the Teylerian Society of Haarlem.

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steward because he had done wisely;

for the children of this world are in

their generation wiser than the chil-

dren of light.



S E R M O N S.

S E R M O N I.

*Which is our reasonable service.*

ROMANS xii. 1.

**I**N Religion, as in Science, speculative truths are designed to promote useful practice, and are no further valuable to those who admit them than as they actually answer this end. That this is the immediate design of all the doctrines of the Gospel is evident from their constant connection with precept in the sacred writers, who always proceed from theory to the enforcement of a suitable temper and conduct; of this we have a striking instance in the former part of this verse, where the Apostle, as an application of the several doctrinal points

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upon



upon which he had been largely insisting in the foregoing chapters of this epistle, exhorts the Christians at Rome to present their "bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." By this phrase he means the whole of religion—of that pure religion of the heart and life enjoined by the Gospel in opposition to the slaughtered victims presented in sacrifice either by Jews or Gentiles: this, he asserts in the text, is our reasonable service. To prove and enforce the truth of this assertion will therefore be the design of this discourse.

If we examine our own nature, every thing within, every thing around us indicates that Religion is a reasonable service, and that man was intended to present it. First, because he is a weak dependent creature. Survey him in infancy, feeble, helpless, needing parental fondness! not less apprehensive of injuries than liable to them: see him clinging to the mother's breast, and sheltering himself in her bosom upon every little alarm. Thus the first feelings of nature indicate his want of protection, and lead him to seek it from those whom he

con-

conceives more powerful than himself. The same sentiment is evident through the whole of his life. Conscious of his inability to guard against the numberless evils and dangers that surround him, conscious of his insufficiency to procure the means of happiness, his desire of protection and assistance is one of the strongest ties that binds him to political society; and for the sake of this he is willing to sacrifice a part of his property, and in many cases a considerable portion of his natural rights. Yet after all he is liable to innumerable evils and dangers, from which no care of his own, and no protection of his fellow-creatures can guard him.— Though he should flatter himself that his own industry, or the favour of others may enable him to avert poverty and acquire wealth; yet are there examples within the range of every man's experience sufficient to convince him that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding; that the most probable means which human prudence can suggest often fail of success, from a variety of acci-



dents against which no human foresight can provide, and from which no human vigilance can defend.—But however sanguine he may be in his dependence upon either his own abilities, or upon the favour of others, to procure the external means of worldly happiness, are there not a thousand circumstances in which the riches of the whole world, and the most powerful earthly connections would be of no avail? Suppose that your endeavours should be crowned with all the success you could wish, that riches should flow in upon you, that the most powerful connections should court your acceptance, and that pleasures should only wait your enjoyment; yet amidst all this profusion of seeming worldly bliss, is not the heart vulnerable in a thousand ways in which these privileges and enjoyments can afford no relief? Even in the midst of the gayest scenes of pleasure, the heart feels a void, and a very slight circumstance is sufficient to render the cup of worldly bliss vapid and tasteless. But will the sun of prosperity always shine unclouded and serene? Is your life never to be chequered with

with cloudy days and dark tempestuous nights, and will not winter, surrounded with storms, at length close in upon you? Vain presumptuous Man! thou art born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward. Not all thy boasted care can preserve to thee the possessions on which thou valuest thyself; or if it could, not all thy treasures could purchase an exemption from the common lot of humanity. The pang of sorrow must sooner or later be felt, and affliction in some shape or other, will convince thee that thou art at best a poor helpless creature, and that the supports on which thou dependest are weak and insufficient like thyself. Though now elate with wealth, and triumphing in splendour, may not the cup of prosperity be dashed from your hand, and are there not innumerable instances of persons who, by unforeseen reverses of fortune, have been stripped of possessions as great, and driven from palaces to inhabit the cheerless hut of wretched poverty? Though now surrounded with friends whose society gives a relish to the enjoyments of life, are you certain that their hearts will never be estranged from you?



Or should this not happen, will not the time come when either you must be torn from them, or when you must see them drop one by one into the grave, and leave you alone and unsupported, to abide the hoary winter of life? Though now health and cheerfulness glow in your countenance, and play on your cheek, is it in your power, or in that of any of your fellow-mortals, to secure you from the inroads of pain and disease? And when these depress the spirits, will all the possessions, all the enjoyments of the world, give ease and pleasure?

In short, in whatever view you consider man, he is a dependent being; he feels this to be the case, and naturally seeks for assistance and support. The misfortune is, that he applies to the wrong object: instead of trusting to the Rock of Ages, he leans on a feeble reed that will break under him, and wound the hand that reclined upon it. Did we apply to that Being upon whom we really depend for life and all its blessings, we should act a truly wise part; did we endeavour to secure *his* favour and avoid *his* displeasure, we should best consult our interest. More  
espe-

especially will this appear, when we consider that the God on whom we depend, is a Being in whom every perfection centers; whose benevolence inclines him to communicate happiness in such a manner as is consistent with our nature, and who has given us a rule of faith and conduct, which, if we observe, he has solemnly promised that he will make all things to work together for our ultimate and greatest good. Is not Religion then the reasonable service of a dependent creature, like man, to the God on whom he absolutely depends, Religion, which renders him the proper object of the divine favour, and secures it to him—which teaches his hopes of happiness to soar far beyond the precarious enjoyments of this world, to eternal life and felicity; and thus yields the sweetest consolations amidst all the distresses and evils of the present state?

Religion is likewise our reasonable service, as it is the exercise of the best affections of the heart, and of those which are most influential on the moral conduct. In the habitual exercise of that piety and devotion which religion inspires, we contemplate the ever-



living source of all perfection and happiness; an object which fills the mind with pleasing astonishment, enlarges our views, elevates our sentiments and excites us to an imitation of that which we cannot but admire. It leads us to survey that infinite power and majesty, which will not fail to produce a deep veneration of God, and a spirit of universal humility. By suggesting the persuasion of his omnipresence, it provides a powerful check upon our conduct, and tends to make us constantly watchful of our whole behaviour, as those who are conscious that they live under the immediate inspection of the great Searcher of hearts. By rendering us conversant with his beneficence as the source of all we are, of all we enjoy, and all we hope for, it tends to call forth the liveliest sentiments of gratitude to him, and of benevolence towards our fellow-creatures. When we meditate on his all-protecting providence, and on his gracious promises of support and favour, soothing confidence represses every anxious apprehension, and bids the soul be calm amidst surrounding dangers. Deep-felt admiration, humble

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reverence, cheerful confidence and grateful love, with every other amiable and delightful affection of the heart, is the natural tribute to that goodness which creates and sustains worlds without number, and sentient beings beyond calculation. True piety, so far from being attended with moroseness and severity, is the only legitimate parent of cheerfulness, complacency and every attractive virtue. They who, with every opening day, in the exercise of sincere devotion commit themselves, and all their concerns, to the protection and friendship of the greatest and best of beings, will find every gloomy and desponding idea vanish with the shades of night. On them "the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings," will dispel the obscuring clouds of sin and misery, and with the cheerful beams of sacred joy illuminating all their ways of virtue, will render their path brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

That religion is a reasonable service, which man was intended to present, will further appear if we consider that the hopes which it inspires are consonant to his nature, and  
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necessary to his happiness. Of all the creatures that inhabit the world, Man alone is the Child of Hope. The brutes, unconscious of distant evil, seem in the present moment of possession to enjoy all the felicity of which their natures are capable. The herds feel no wants when those of appetite are gratified: the bee sucks the fragrant flower impregnated with the dew of heaven, and asks no more: the birds of the air gather the grain scattered by the liberality of heaven, and pour forth the notes of unalloyed delight. Blind to futurity, neither the hope of greater pleasures prompts them to undervalue present enjoyments, nor do fears of remote want and danger poison the bliss which the passing moment offers. To man alone is present happiness incomplete: to him alone Reason opens a prospect of the eventful scenes of futurity, the sense of which affects his present enjoyments, and renders his happiness here dependent on his hopes rather than his possessions. Whatever pleasing impressions he may receive from the latter, they are much too transient to afford felicity, unless he can prolong them beyond  
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the present moment by the hope of their being either continued or repeated. We have reason to think that this would be the case, even in the most complete gratification that imagination could suggest; for we cannot conceive that a rational being could derive complete satisfaction, even from objects the best calculated to produce it, if he knew that it must be purchased by an immediate resignation of every future hope. How essentially necessary then is hope to administer felicity to man, whose pleasures are transient, and whose enjoyments, in every instance, fall far beneath the soaring flight of expectation. Those of you who are arrived at maturer years, and have attained those advantages which were once the object of your most ardent desires, will acknowledge that these yield not in possession that high degree of relish which at a distance they promised. You will acknowledge that amidst all your present enjoyments you sometimes look back with fond regret on the smiling years of youth, when the animal spirits were buoyed up with exhilarating expectations, when ardent hope,

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unallayed by experience, and unabated by disappointment, roved unconfined through all the gay paradise of imaginary happiness. — Why, amidst all their possessions, do the most successful find their dispositions to cheerfulness gradually decrease as they advance in years? Among other reasons that may be assigned, this is one of the principal: that with every added day the prospect of life becomes more and more contracted, and leaves less room for hope to sport in, while experience of disappointment checks the fallies of fancy, and damps the ardour of expectation.

Thus are we dependent upon hope even for temporal comfort. But alas! every expectation which has this world for its object, must inevitably perish, and man were the most wretched of creatures if all his hopes were confined to the present life. For without insisting on the uncertainty of every worldly blessing, without mentioning the numberless sorrows which mortal flesh is heir to, nor the innumerable unforeseen events which may in a moment strip us of every thing dear and valuable, and with the sudden

sudden irresistible force of lightning blast all  
 our earthly hopes; suffice it to observe that  
 one event awaits us all, which must rend us  
 from every temporal comfort, and in which  
 all the expectations of the children of this  
 world must for ever terminate. Though  
 every success should attend you, and you  
 should have abundance laid up for many  
 years, yet this night your soul may be re-  
 quired of you, and all your possessions be  
 reduced to a coffin and a shroud. But  
 should your lives be prolonged to the latest  
 date, the evil days must come at last, and  
 the years in which you will say you have no  
 pleasure in them; when the ebbing tide of  
 life bears off every sublunary good to bury  
 it in the unfathomable gulph of eternity,  
 how truly miserable will be your case if the  
 hopes inspired by religion are not yours!  
 If you are unsupported by these, miserable  
 and comfortless beyond description will be  
 your old age: no winter will be more cheer-  
 less than your lives, no night more dismal  
 than your minds, no sky more black and  
 portentous than that which will bound your  
 prospects. Amidst a disrelish to every thing  
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that once gave you delight, and the increasing infirmities of a debilitated frame, amidst the visible approaches of your last enemy, and the sorrows and distresses that will from every quarter break upon your peace, what will support you? If you have not cultivated those hopes of future happiness, which beam everlasting day in the bosom of the sincere Christian, you will of all beings be the most miserable; and one sad eternal night will shed its pale horrors all around, within, without, above, and beneath you.

As hope is thus essentially necessary to human happiness, how excellently adapted to our nature is the religion of Jesus, which tends to improve, exalt and direct this turn of the affections to objects more durable, sublime and satisfactory, than any this world can afford. Futurity presents nothing to the mind of man worthy his attention or solicitude, which is not intimately connected with eternity. Amidst all the enjoyments this world can afford, man pines for more; and feels a capacity of happiness to which nothing less is adequate than the prospects religion presents, and the affections religion inspires.

inspires. The glorious and divine hope of life and happiness eternal, which is brought to light by the Gospel, is the only true source of felicity to man. Amidst all the disgusts and dissatisfactions, amidst all the dire disappointments, sorrows, and afflictions of the present world, this hope supports and exhilarates the mind. It is as truly the source of vigour and cheerfulness to the soul as the sun is that of light and warmth to the creation; and the perfections and virtues of the moral world have a dependence on the one, similar to that which the various productions in the natural world have on the other. Every grateful idea which cheers the mind, together with every pleasing sensation that warms and dilates the heart, is the legitimate offspring of this enlivening principle, the effects of which, in general, are proportioned to the sublimity and excellence of the objects to which it points; and the whole temper receives a pleasing character from the hope of our calling, as medicinal springs receive their flavour and virtues from the various strata through which they flow.

The mind of the sincerely pious Christian,  
inspired



inspired by the promises, invigorated by the principles, and supported by the prospects of the Gospel, rises superior to every affliction. He is not insensible to his pains, the tear of sorrow flows from his humid eye, the sigh of anguish heaves his tortured bosom; but borne upon the eagle wings of religious hope, his soul soon pierces the clouds of affliction, and towers above the misty atmosphere of woe. It is more especially in these circumstances of adversity that hope, the gentlest offspring of heaven, the tenderest friend that ever soothed the anguish, or bound up the bleeding wounds of distressed humanity, steps in to his assistance, and claims kindred with the wretched in the greatest extremity. Hope, in a tone more soft and melodious than that of angels, whispers the words of heavenly peace to his troubled heart, bids him be assured that sorrowing and sighing shall soon be done away, that "his righteousness shall yet break forth as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day." Even when his sufferings are most exquisite, religion teaches him to rejoice and be exceeding glad, in the happy and full per-

persuasion that great will be his reward in heaven. Hope is the sheet anchor of his soul, which enables him to ride out all the storms of the tempestuous ocean of life, and when all is confusion, distress, and terror around him, preserves him stedfast and immoveable in the best principles and the happiest prospects. When every earthly hold eludes his grasp, when every support of humanity glides from under him, when he feels his body gradually wasting in the pains of sickness, or undermined by the infirmities of age, religious hope looks beyond his decaying earthly tabernacle of dust and ashes, and invariably points to "an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Religion fixes his meditations and affections upon things above; by faith he anticipates the happiness of the invisible world, of those regions of undisturbed felicity "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." His hope of this felicity quells the murmurs of impatience, and renders his heart tranquil and resigned: it reconciles him to the loss even of his best and dearest friends, and transports him after



them into that eternity, where he is assured they shall meet again in endless happiness, "and be for ever with the Lord."

Thus is Religion happily suited to the nature of man, as a dependent creature, as a moral agent, and as the child of hope. It is therefore in every respect a reasonable service, without which we not only cannot be happy, but must be miserable. Let us not however deceive ourselves, by thinking that its advantages will be conferred on those, who are practically careless, and indifferent about it. To enjoy the consolations it affords, to be inspired with the amiable dispositions it promotes, to be animated with the encouraging hopes it suggests, we must not be satisfied with the mere profession, but must diligently cultivate its duties, and endeavour to imbibe its principles. However slightly men of the world may think of piety to God, it is as essential a part of morality, as any duty towards our fellow-creatures. The latter, however valuable in themselves, may be practised from a regard to interest or reputation, or from other inferior considerations, which indicate

no extraordinary elevation of character; whereas a truly religious disposition is at once an indication of the best principles, and the source of the purest goodness. The character of those who neglect religion is at best inconsistent and unsteady. Even their virtues are founded upon a basis too narrow and unsafe, while in their forgetfulness of God, they manifest an insensibility to the best principles, and most amiable emotions of the heart. Let us therefore never be ashamed to avow the principles, and to practise the duties of our holy religion; let us fear God, as well as keep his commandments, and in the exercise of devotion, and the cultivation of holiness, as well as in the discharge of social and relative duty, let me exhort you, "by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."



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## S E R M O N II.

*In which are some things hard to be understood.*

2 PETER iii. 16.

**W**HAT the Apostle Peter here asserts of the writings of St. Paul, has often been affirmed of revelation in general, and with different views by its imprudent friends, and by its designing enemies. The former assert this with a view to exalt its dignity, extend its influence, and not seldom to impose and propagate their own strange comments upon it; the latter, secretly to undermine, or openly to attack its authority. But it is surely an advantage very injudiciously ceded by the friends of the Gospel to its opposers, when they consent to exclude reason from any concern in matters of religion, and acknowledge that its truths are far beyond its sphere, and that, till enlightened by extraordinary measures of grace, we are unable to understand what



it has pleased the Supreme Being to reveal to us.—Can we wonder that the unbeliever should eagerly lay hold on an assertion, which, were it true, would be an unanswerable objection to the divine authority of the Gospel, as it would be an impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of the Deity to suppose he would defeat his own ends, by commanding his rational creatures to receive instruction which was far beyond the reach of their capacity to understand, and which required a second revelation to explain and render intelligible.

We cannot assert that the New Testament, to which we mean to confine our observations, has nothing obscure in any of its parts, but we think it may be shewn that this obscurity is not such, as involves any objection to its divine authority, and only such as is common to all works of great antiquity, and which arises from a difference between the language, manners, customs, and opinions of the writers, and those which now prevail among mankind.—All these circumstances must necessarily occasion many difficulties to the modern reader, and must

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founded on the obscurity and uncertainty of the expressions of Scripture will depend on this question. Does this obscurity affect our certainty of those truths, which we have already mentioned as essential to religion? This we think cannot be proved.—How plain is the instruction of Christ and his apostles with respect to the attributes and perfections of the Deity! and how repeatedly are these inculcated to fill us with admiration, reverence, and love of the Supreme Being! How clearly do they teach the doctrine of an all directing providence, of the cognizance which God takes of the conduct of his rational creatures, of a future judgment, and a consequent state of reward or punishment to all mankind!

Nor can we object to the precepts of the Gospel from any obscurity with which they may be involved. Our duty to God, to our neighbour and to ourselves is every where so explicitly taught, and so repeatedly enforced, that it is impossible for us to be uncertain concerning the intention and meaning of revelation in these important particulars.—We do not mean to assert that every  
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passage, in which these truths and precepts are mentioned, is equally clear and easy to be understood; it is sufficient that, on the whole, they are so plainly taught, that an upright and attentive mind cannot be uncertain concerning either the principles or the practice of religion.

Neither is there any obscurity respecting the historical facts of the Gospel: The birth of Jesus, his mode of instruction, the miracles he performed to establish his divine mission, his death, resurrection, and ascension, and the propagation of the gospel by his apostles, are all so plainly related as to leave no uncertainty concerning these events.—Certain circumstances are indeed mentioned by some, which are omitted by other evangelists, and facts are not always related in the same manner by the different historians; hence difficulties may sometimes arise; but these are not of a nature to affect the truth of the narration, or to enfeeble our faith, which does not properly consist in curious speculation and minute criticism, but in the improvement of our hearts, and the regulation of our actions, to the end  
that



that "we may be a peculiar people zealous  
"of good works."

But perhaps, it may be alleged that all this is mere assertion, and is contradicted by experience and the relations of ecclesiastical history.—It may be said, that the innumerable different opinions which have prevailed among Christians, and the vast variety of sects into which they have been divided, indicate that, even the doctrines of the Gospel, are not expressed with sufficient perspicuity. In answer to this objection we may observe, that it supposes all difference of opinion to arise from the uncertainty or obscurity of the subject matter, which is by no means always the case, especially in religion.

Mankind are not universally influenced by the pure love of truth. Are there not many whose judgment is miserably warped by a blind attachment to prejudices of education, by an implicit reliance on the authority either of individuals, or the dictates of an assembly of Divines? Besides, have not the most certain truths been sometimes contradicted; and are not different opinions  
found

found among the professors of every science? Has not even natural philosophy her various systems? are not her votaries distinguished and denominated according as they are followers of Des Cartes, Newton, or Leibnits? But should we not reason very absurdly if hence we were to conclude that there was no certainty in the principles of this science? Besides, the divisions and different opinions of christians are not concerning those doctrines which immediately relate to the nature of the Deity, or to his designs towards us as our moral Governor. All Christians, however they may differ in other points, agree in these: All believe that God from motives of love and mercy to mankind sent Jesus, his Christ, into the world to save sinful man, to teach the will of God, to bring life and immortality to light, and to lead them to virtue and final happiness. All acknowledge Jesus as a divine messenger, and as their Lord and Saviour; all profess their obligation to regulate their conduct according to his precepts and example. All believe that he will come again in the glory of the Father to judge man-



mankind, and to dispense the rewards and punishments of a future state. The agreement of all Christians in these points is a proof that these doctrines, at least, are clearly and unequivocally revealed in the New Testament. Hence we may convert the objection into an argument in favour of what we have here asserted: for if all the various sects of Christians, who have differed so widely, and have opposed each other with such inveterate hatred upon other points, have yet always agreed in these essential doctrines, it follows that these are revealed with such clearness and certainty as to leave no room for doubt concerning them, and that the little influence they have on the minds of professors towards restraining their violent passions and bitter animosities, proceeds from some other cause than want of perspicuity.

Thus it appears, that, with respect to the essentials of the Christian Religion, the knowledge we derive from the New Testament is attended with a degree of certainty which is sufficient to justify our full conviction,

tion, and to prevent our minds from being distressed with doubts concerning them.

But though our certainty of the doctrines both of natural and revealed religion be sufficient to give us a full assurance of their truth; yet it cannot be denied that our knowledge of them is, in many respects, very imperfect. Let even the wisest of mankind consider the vast multitude of things of which he has only a slight and superficial knowledge, and he finds that what he knows bears only a very small proportion to that of which he is ignorant. The mind is every moment stopped in its inquiries by difficulties which are insurmountable. Of some things we can scarcely form an idea; in others we find obscurities and inexplicable difficulties; of very few have we a clear, and of scarcely any, a full comprehension. Even many of those things, of which we have sufficient certainty are attended with such obscurity that the inquisitive mind is obstructed in its researches, and obliged to rest satisfied with a very superficial knowledge.

We can, for instance, demonstrate, by the



the most convincing proofs the existence of God, the supreme and invifible cause of all things. But how little do we know of the Deity! Who can investigate his nature? or how can we comprehend his necessary and eternal existence? Can we form any adequate idea of his creating the universe by a fingle act of volition, calling things which *be not*, even as if *they were*? Who can form any notion of the manner in which God takes cognizance of every thing throughout the immense extent of the universe? and who can form an idea of an immaterial being?

We acknowledge the Deity not only as the creator, but alfo as the moral governor of the world. But how little do we know of the divine government! how contracted are our views of the plan of providence! Though we have the moft fatisfactory reasons to be affured that fupreme wifdom directs every event, yet there are many things which appear fo irregular and confufed, that were we to fix our attention upon thefe alone, we might be tempted to think that every event was the refult of  
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mere chance. We are also convinced, both by reason and revelation, that there will be a future state of existence: but how very obscure and indefinite is our prospect beyond the veil which separates time from eternity! The same may be said of our knowledge of the Gospel history, which though satisfactory, upon the whole, with respect to the evidence of its truth, is nevertheless in many circumstances imperfect. Thus incomplete is all our knowledge, thus limited are the powers and capacities of our souls.—Contemplations upon this subject have often inspired with melancholy doubts those who were the most sincere and ardent inquirers after truth.

But nothing is more unreasonable than the conclusion that we cannot know things with certainty because we cannot know them perfectly. A doctrine, which is in some respects beyond the reach of reason, must not be confounded with a doctrine which is directly contrary to it. The latter is no object of our faith, as what is in itself contradictory and impossible cannot be true; but the former ought not to be thus rejected.



ed.—When, for example, we have deduced from the most certain principles the existence of the eternal and supreme cause, our imperfect knowledge of his nature and attributes can be no just reason for doubting the truth itself. The same holds good with respect to the doctrine of an all-directing providence, for which the most convincing arguments are derived from the knowledge we have of the divine attributes, and the wonderful order and regular course of the world and all its events. Those things therefore which cannot be reconciled, or may appear contrary to it, should not be considered as proceeding from real, but only from apparent irregularities, and attributable solely to the narrow limits of our understandings, and to the small part of that immense plan of operation which lies before us.—Look back into the history of arts and of sciences, and you will see mankind often murmuring at, or condemning as useless, those things which a more improved philosophy has shewn either not to exist, or to be highly beneficial and wisely ordered. Thus the poet Lucretius complains that

two zones are uninhabitable, one from excessive cold, the other from immoderate heat; that mountains, seas, and lakes, which take up so great a part of the surface of the earth, are entirely useless. Thus does self-conceit make its own ignorance the standard by which it presumes to estimate the works of infinite wisdom.

We see then that though objections may be started to things obscure and difficult in revelation, our faith in it ought not to be weakened, even though we should not be able to remove them. There being a wide difference between objections which relate only to particular parts of a history, and those which strike at the authenticity of the history itself, or the evidence upon which it is admitted.

If this distinction be not observed, all human knowledge might be made to appear uncertain and precarious, no science being entirely free from difficulties, and hardly any truth concerning which doubts may not be started. So that were we to confine our belief to such things only as we could perfectly know, we should be confined with-

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in the verge of mathematical demonstration.

It remains now to inquire whether a more complete certainty with regard to religious truth would be equally suited to our circumstances as rational beings in a state of trial and moral discipline.

Two moral principles generally actuate mankind.—The one is a love of virtue, the other is a desire of happiness.—It is the former of these that gives our actions moral worth, by which we do not mean to assert that a good man is not, or ought not to be influenced by a desire of greater perfection and happiness, but only that reward is not the sole foundation of moral *obligation*. Our beneficent Creator has implanted in us this desire of happiness, and has in general, even in this life, connected enjoyment with virtue, and misery with vice, in order to encourage us to the one, and deter us from the other. But it is inconsistent with a state of probation that these consequences of virtue and vice should be so immediate and certain as to have, in every instance, an irresistible influence on our will.

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To beings situated as we are, in a state of trial, and, perhaps, in the lowest stage of their existence, perfect assurance and perfect knowledge are impossible. It is proper that a sincere and virtuous mind should have such a degree of certainty of the righteous dealings of God as a moral governor, as will keep alive faith and inspire hope and confidence, but so far is a palpable certainty from being necessary, that it would be inconsistent with a state of probation. What would become of faith, of hope, of patience, of self-denial, and of various other virtues and graces of the christian warfare? The exercise of these form the life of God in the soul of man. They have a beauty and dignity far surpassing any other attainments to which mortals can arrive.

Unequal dispensations of good and evil are, perhaps, inseparable from our present state of existence. Even misfortunes and afflictions have their use; instances often occur in which they are the means of increasing our happiness even here; and, if we rightly improve them, they will certainly promote our greatest and ultimate felicity:



they moderate our attachment to the things of this world, draw off our regards from inferior objects, recal us to a sense of duty, and convince us of the superior value of a better and more exalted state of existence. —

With respect to the genuineness and credibility of the Gospel, and of the historical facts related in the New Testament, it has been objected that the evidence might be stronger; that God might confirm it to us anew by miracles, and thus remove all possibility of doubt with regard to its truth.

In answer to this we may observe, in the first place, that miracles by being often repeated would cease to have their effect; and that however suitable such extraordinary displays of Divine power may be to the establishment of a new dispensation, they are not necessary at a period when the fulfilment of prophecy amply supplies their place.

Besides, as we observed on another occasion, the question is not concerning the possibility of stronger evidence, but concerning the sufficiency of the present, and the greater advantage derivable from it.

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God deals with mankind as with free and rational agents. He desires that they should come to the knowledge of the truth and live according to his will; but he will not force them to this, or compel them to be pious and virtuous. This would be totally inconsistent with the nature of virtue, and with moral agency. It would however be a kind of compulsion if the principles of the Gospel were forced upon the mind with the palpable evidence that this objection seems to require.

On the contrary, in our reception of religious truth, much depends on the disposition of the heart. This is beautifully set forth in the parable of our blessed Lord, under the figure of the Sower who went forth to sow seed. He who is a slave to vicious inclinations and habits, will not easily be convinced by moral disquisitions. He will cherish doubts in his mind that will prevent his assenting to truths, which are displeasing to his taste.

There is a natural affinity between a good heart, and the truths of the Gospel. As a sound eye sees objects as they really



are, so a good and virtuous heart receives the general truths of religion in their real form, and with their natural tendency. But there is, in a vicious disposition, a natural antipathy to moral and religious truth. Persons of this character have an aversion to every thing which counteracts their vicious inclinations, and condemns their sinful course; the light of religious truth is painful, and the darkness of scepticism becomes their refuge, because it leaves them to go on without restraint.

This tendency in mankind to believe those truths which are most congenial to their habitual affections, was often the subject of our blessed Lord's discourses. Hence he so frequently insisted on the necessity of a virtuous disposition, as the only means by which his doctrines could gain access to the heart. "If any man (says he) will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself."

Hence also the propriety of the mission of John the Baptist, who went forth as the harbinger to prepare a way for the admission of

of the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel into the hearts of men, by awakening them to a sense of their condition and producing in them a sincere repentance.

To conclude; those fundamental principles upon which all true religion depends are by no means deficient in certainty as they are unfolded in the Gospel. That there is a God who created the world and all that it contains, who continually preserves and governs it by his providence—that it is our duty to love, obey and reverence this Creator and Benefactor—that he neither is, nor can be, indifferent to the moral conduct of his reasonable offspring—and that, according to their works he will reward or punish them hereafter; these are truths conformable to sound reason, and sufficiently established by the authority of revelation.

The doubts which may arise concerning them are of no weight, when compared with the arguments in their favour, and will therefore have no influence on a serious and well-disposed heart. To clear up every difficulty that may occur respecting the contents of revelation, and to remove every



objection that may be urged against it, is, in the present state, impossible. To creatures so short-sighted as we are, many things must be in part concealed. Nor can we who, perhaps, are in the lowest rank of intelligent beings, who are placed here in a state of discipline to cultivate our rational powers and improve our capacities of knowledge, expect to fathom every truth, or perfectly to comprehend the depths of divine wisdom. "Here we walk by faith, and not "by sight."

There are, and must be, many things which we are obliged to receive as truths, and which even the greatest sceptic believes as such, concerning which it is impossible to remove every doubt that may arise. Why should we require greater certainty concerning religion? Here we know but in part : but the time will come, when all these mists will be dispelled by the radiant lustre of truth! "When that which is perfect is "come, then that which is in part shall be "done away : for now we see through a glass "darkly ; but then face to face."

They who, by walking in the paths of  
truth

truth and virtue, endeavour to prepare themselves for a future state, will there enjoy an opportunity of extending their rational faculties, of making further progress in the knowledge of the unbounded works, and infinitely wise dispensations of the Deity. To them the treasures of divine wisdom will be abundantly opened: they will be admitted into the sanctuary of heavenly truth, and as they advance into it will, with heartfelt rapture, adopt the exclamation of the Apostle, "O! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" They will spend eternal ages in investigating the most astonishing and delightful truths, and in them find inexhaustible sources of gratitude and praise.

Such is the happy employment destined for us, as intelligent beings and as Christians, when the veil shall be removed from our eyes, and our capacities be enlarged to survey the wonderful works of God. Let us not "cast away the pearl of great price," but rather determine with the  
Apostle



Apostle "to count all things but loss, that  
"we may win Christ," in whom are contain-  
ed, and by whom will be administered, all  
the riches of wisdom and of happiness.



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## S E R M O N   I I I .

*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all  
acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the  
world to save sinners. 1 TIM. i. 15.*

**I**T is a melancholy reflection that, in an enlightened age and a Protestant country, the ministers of the Gospel should find the salutary effects of their labours obstructed by the influence of scepticism and infidelity. Did we, like the clergy of the Romish church, lock up the sources of religious truth, by prohibiting the reading of the Scriptures; did we demand the sacrifice of your reason to your faith; did we involve religion in mystical obscurity, and insist upon your believing implicitly and without examination all that we preach, you would be justified in revolting from such spiritual tyranny; your scepticism would be excusable and your infidelity not astonishing. But when, instead of excluding you from the fountain of  
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sacred truth, we intreat you to search the Scriptures; when we beseech you to try every doctrine we preach by the standards of reason and revelation, one would imagine that, when thus candidly and fairly treated, scepticism would cease to doubt, and incredulity blush at her obstinacy.

Our modern infidels are of two classes: in one class we may rank those who are unbelievers from ignorance, levity and indifference. Libertines in principle and frequently in conduct they are equally ignorant of natural and revealed religion, and equally indifferent to the interests of both. Whatever character they may assume they certainly deserve not the name of philosophers, as the little knowledge they possess consists in gleanings from the superficial writings of the French Deists; authors who deal in bold assertions and lively misrepresentations, and who substitute the vivacity of wit for depth of reasoning and solidity of argument.

But there is another class of sceptics whose characters claim the esteem, and whose errors excite the compassion of every sincere  
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and benevolent Christian: these are either professed Deists, who acknowledge the principles, and in the main live agreeably to the rules of natural Religion; or those who, while they pass under the denomination of Christians, yet, from their own partial views of the Gospel, or from its having been represented to them through the medium of superstition or fanaticism, are in doubt whether to believe or to reject Christianity.—Such there are in almost every religious society, who maintain upon the whole an upright and benevolent conduct, and may justly be said to be *not far from the kingdom of heaven*. All such I would most affectionately and earnestly intreat to view the Gospel through the combined mediums of reason and revelation, diligently to examine its evidences, and candidly to search the Scriptures; and I am certain that the consequence of such an inquiry will be the removal of their unhappy doubts: for, though while in this state of being we can know but in part, yet so much knowledge is within the reach of all as will convince them of the excellence of the Gospel, and render them “not  
“ only



"only almost but altogether Christians," both in principle and practice.

The end of our Saviour's coming into the world, as expressed in the text and in numberless other passages of the New Testament, is so benevolent in itself, and so worthy of the infinite goodness of the Deity, that however men may cavil at the Gospel in other respects, its design at least can admit of no exception; this comes home to the bosoms of all, offers a remedy of which all stand in need, and is worthy of acceptance from every one who has the least sense of his own condition.

The consistent Deist must allow his obligations to the practice of piety and virtue; he must acknowledge that as a moral agent he is accountable to the moral Governor of the universe, who will reward or punish him according as he has acted conformably to the dictates of conscience and the natural obligations of virtue. And where is the man who, after having taken a retrospect of life, can say that he has not, in many instances, acted against the plain dictates of his conscience, and in a manner detrimental  
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to his fellow-creatures? In short all, whatever may be their sentiments of religion, must acknowledge themselves sinners.

To take cognizance of vice as well as of virtue is inseparable from the character of a moral Governor; and to suppose that either, we or our actions are too insignificant to engage his attention, is not humbling ourselves, but degrading the Deity whose inspecting eye and guardian care extend as well to the meanest as to the greatest of his works. It is not less a dictate of natural than of revealed religion, that "not a spar-row falls to the ground" without his permission, and that "the very hairs of our head are all numbered" before him.

Whence then can the Deist hope for the pardon of his sins, and the acceptance of his piety and virtue, evidently deficient and imperfect? Whence, but from the beneficence and mercy of a Being whom he conceives to be infinitely good as well as just?—In this the Deist agrees with the Christian, and the hopes of nature are the same with those afforded by the Gospel. But with respect to the foundation and extent of these hopes,



hopes, how great are the advantages which the Christian enjoys, and how thankfully ought we to accept of the assurance the Gospel bestows !

The obligations of the Deist with regard to moral duty are exactly the same with those of the Christian. In this case the Gospel imposes no new yoke; but only opens to our view additional motives, and confers more powerful assistance towards the performance of that obedience to which we were by the conditions of our nature already bound. As it is true that all are under an obligation to obey the laws of reason and conscience, it is equally certain that none perfectly, and few even tolerably, comply with this obligation and pay this obedience.

In these circumstances all the probability which unassisted reason can attain, all the hopes that natural religion can form, is a presumption from the goodness of the Deity and the weakness of man, that God may forbear to render his creatures finally miserable on account of their sins, and that after they have been purified from their vices by punishment

nishment and discipline their imperfect obedience may be accepted. This was the opinion of many of the ancient philosophers, and from hence the Church of Rome derived the doctrine of purgatory. Modern Deists have ascribed to natural religion many ideas derived from the Old and New Testament, and have credited reason for those discoveries for which they are indebted to the revelation which they affect to despise. It is with me a doubt whether the certainty of the forgiveness of sins, upon repentance alone, be a doctrine discoverable by unassisted reason; but, without disputing this point, we may safely assert that a presumption of this is the utmost to which unassisted reason can attain. As even according to the dictates of natural religion we can claim no merit, we can, upon the same principles, challenge no reward; much less can the light of reason and the rules of natural equity give sinful and imperfect creatures any foundation to expect a reward infinitely exceeding the merits even of the most perfect obedience and virtue.

As conscious of having offended, the wish

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to be pardoned by God is natural to every thinking being. But while unassisted reason labours hard to raise this wish into a hope, which after all rests upon a narrow foundation, the Gospel prevents your wishes, builds up your hopes upon the amplest grounds, and freely offers more than man can desire.—In the sacred page of revelation we find proposed to all who are sincerely repentant, not merely the doubtful prospect of pardon, but the full promise of forgiveness, the free assurance of impunity, the immense gift of eternal life and happiness.

Nature sees all her children descending to the grave, laments them hastening to that “undiscovered country from whose dark bourn no traveller returns,” and while the weary worn-out pilgrim wanders through the dark valley of the shadow of death, the feeble lamp of reason can offer nothing to comfort him in his passage, except the faint presumption that there may be an hereafter, which, like the doubtful glimmer of twilight, serves rather to discover than to dispel the horrors around him, and instead of illuminating the scene, only renders darkness

ness visible. But how nobly different are the prospects afforded by the Gospel? The Christian is taught to look upon this state as no more than the dawn of immortality. His existence in this world, with all its advantages, he considers as bearing an infinitely less proportion to his life and happiness hereafter, than the confined condition of the infant in the womb does to the faculties and enjoyments of the full-grown man. These exalted views afford him comfort amidst the sorrows of affliction, and security amidst the snares of prosperity: they render him happy during this life, and in death open to his view the most transporting scenes. Assured that Christ came into the world to save sinners, he gratefully complies with the terms, and in the exercise of a sincere repentance humbly relies on the goodness and power of his Redeemer. The promises of acceptance and support, of life and happiness hereafter, beam full upon his mind, and cheer his departing moments. Death he considers as the gate of life, pain and sickness as the road to happiness eternal. Death is abolished by his conquering Lord, and life and immor-



talities brought to light. Heaven in all its splendours breaks in upon his sight, that glorious palace of his Father and his God, in which are many mansions where his Saviour has prepared a place for him, and where he shall enjoy life for ever, and be constantly improving in knowledge, in virtue and in happiness, through all the endless ages of eternity.

So noble are these hopes of glory, that one would imagine they would be joyfully accepted by mankind, though the terms upon which they are offered were difficult and severe. But the free and unmerited goodness of God is not less evident in the means of grace than in the hope of glory.

To the diligent and uniform practice of piety and virtue you are already bound by the law of nature. To repentance for your past offences and the amendment of your future lives, you are obliged even by the faint hopes of pardon which natural religion discovers. What new yoke does the Gospel impose which should deter you from thankfully accepting its proffered mercy? It requires our faith. But can it be deemed unjust

just that a rational being should believe what he may fairly examine, and of the divine authority of which he may have full conviction? Can it be thought unreasonable that his conduct should be influenced by the most exalted motives derived from the purest truths?—It requires our grateful love of that Redeemer who gave himself to the end “that all who believe in him should not “perish, but have everlasting life.” And for such inconceivable benefits is the debt of gratitude burdensome? Are we forgetful that we owe even our temporal mercies to the divine bounty, and are we loth to add spiritual blessings to the vast account? Is love to such a benefactor a sentiment foreign to a well-disposed mind? is it forced upon the affections of a benevolent heart? We are required to rely on his mediation and saving power. But can it be thought a hardship to trust in him of whose ability and inclination to befriend us we have the most ample demonstration? Is a long train of ritual observances and expensive sacrifices appointed as the condition of our salvation? The Gospel institutes only two positive ordi-



nances, and these neither of a nature troublesome, expensive, or painful. The simple rite of Baptism is substituted for the painful ceremony of Circumcision, and the Lord's Supper every one must acknowledge to be an institution not burdensome yet well calculated to revive in our minds a sense of our obligations to our dying Lord.

Thus limited are the views, thus faint the hopes, thus poor the consolation which natural religion has to offer to creatures conscious of having deviated from the path of duty; to creatures conscious of having offended a being of infinite purity and justice. Yet faint as are these hopes, poor as are these consolations, even these are not obvious and common to all. Not even these favours, small as they are, has nature imparted to mankind in general; a few only of her favorites to whom she has been partial, and whom she has blessed with larger capacities and stronger powers than were the lot of others, have been able to investigate and to enjoy them. These truths, imperfect as they are, cannot be deemed the spontaneous productions of nature, the fruit of every

ry soil, and common to every climate. Like the tender exotic, they seem the natives of some happier sky, which can with difficulty exist amidst the chilling discouragements, and the tempestuous passions of this uncertain state. Here they cannot be produced without much culture, nor preserved without much care; the cold soil of human reason is not sufficiently fertile for their produce without the genial warmth of more than common genius, and the preparation of extraordinary culture: how much care is necessary to preserve them from being warped by error, or blasted by superstition! and after all, how few, how unsatisfying the fruits they yield! But view these truths in the native clime, see them planted in the soil of the Gospel; how vigorous, how abundant is their growth! In vain would the pernicious weeds of error creep around the root, and with insidious grasp twine around the branches; in vain would the malignant blasts of superstition check the growth, and frustrate the fertility of this celestial plant. Deeply rooted and constantly preserved by the fostering care of its divine



Author, it triumphs over all opposition, spreads its branches far and wide, and, free as the common benefits of nature, dispenses the fruits of heavenly joy and consolation to mankind.

To the man whose rejection of the Gospel proceeds from the corruption of his heart, and the licentiousness of his life, the above arguments are not addressed. A candid discussion is what he studiously avoids. Ignorance and insensibility give a false repose to his conscience, and lead to that lethargic state which is the highest wish of his degraded heart. But while we turn with mixed feelings of displeasure and pity from beings whose probationary course is thus perverted, and *whose end is destruction*, we feel the utmost concern for the man, whose virtuous conduct and amiable disposition are productive of happiness to those with whom he stands connected in society, while within himself all is doubt and darkness, and his voyage through this life uncertain, uncomfortable and gloomy, like that of the mariner without a compass to direct his way through the watery waste.

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Let such, who are willing to submit to the moral restraints which Gospel purity requires avail themselves of the light revelation affords, and of the succours which grace holds out. Let them weigh the arguments in its favour, and like the faithful Bereans *search the Scriptures* with candour, humility, and diligence; and may the issue of such endeavours resemble the declaration of those honest inquirers who, after ascertaining the report of the Samaritan woman, returned and said, "Now we believe, not "because of thy sayings, for we have heard "him ourselves, and we know that this is "indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the "world."



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## S E R M O N IV.

*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him. ACTS x. 34, 35.*

THIS humane reflection may be considered as the triumph of evangelical benevolence over Jewish bigotry. The occasion on which it was made was memorable, as it is generally believed that Cornelius and his family were the first among the Gentiles, to whom the gospel was declared, and who were admitted into the bosom of the christian church. The apostle Peter, by whom it was uttered, was originally a Jew of no liberal education, and till this period, not a little infected with the contracted notions of his countrymen. Like the rest of that nation he considered the Israelites as the only favourites of God, and deemed all others as unworthy of the attention of the Deity.



Deity. This temper was often apparent in his conduct, during the life of his great Master, whom he then thought to see elevated to a temporal throne, restoring the Jewish nation to its greatest glory, and subduing the world under its yoke. And even when, after the death and resurrection of our Lord, he became acquainted with the spiritual nature of the Messiah's kingdom, he was still so far actuated by this national spirit, as to suppose that its blessings were to be confined to his own people, exclusive of all mankind. But notwithstanding the prejudice which he had imbibed, and the reluctance he felt to the admission of the Gentiles, no sooner was he convinced by the two visions addressed to him and to Cornelius, of the enlarged intentions of divine Beneficence, than new light bursts in upon his mind with sudden and penetrating radiance, dispels the darkening clouds of prepossession and error; and his heart, clear of all partial affections, is opened to the warmest influences of truth and benevolence.

The character of Cornelius was such as must have operated with great force towards  
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removing the prejudices of the apostle. Though a Roman officer and probably educated in idolatry, though he lived in an age and country exceedingly corrupt, and though of a profession which abounds with temptations to immorality, yet he preserved his character free from the general contagion, and his virtues are recorded in a manner which sets him in the most amiable and honourable light. Though not a Jew, yet he had attained the knowledge and cultivated the worship of the true God. His piety was humble and sincere, his benevolence large and extensive. He appears to have been one who in the strictest sense, did justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly with God. Yet with all this rectitude of character, he was modestly conscious of his own defects, and willing to receive further instruction and improvement. These dispositions of the excellent centurion, together with the miraculous intervention of providence towards his conversion, extorted from St. Peter the beautiful reflection in the text.

“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he  
 “that



“ that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.”

Many divines have taken much pains to prove that, by being accepted of God is only meant being admitted into the terms of the Gospel; but, though spoken with an immediate reference to this, the words seem capable of a larger explanation, and imply a general truth. In this enlarged sense, I shall now consider them, by applying them to those who are ignorant of the gospel dispensation, and to those who live under it.

“ The invisible things of God from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.” Reason alone, if rightly improved, would have led men to acknowledge a supreme director, and to pay him the highest veneration. Never was there an age in which the traces of his omnipotence were not equally visible; the works of nature always demonstrated his existence and perfections; the settled order of the universe attested his providence; men had always the same natural sense of right and wrong, the same

same desire of happiness, the same consciousness of their own dependence. By the general constitution of things, virtue was, to a considerable degree, its own reward, and vice, with some few exceptions, its own punishment. "When the Gentiles," says the apostle Paul, "who have not the law;" i. e. the revealed and written law of God, "do by nature the things contained in the law, these, not having the law, are a law unto themselves, who shew forth the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and (as the latter clause should be rendered) their reasonings between one another accusing or else excusing." In this text St. Paul asserts that there is a law of morality independent of revelation, and that it was not unknown to the heathen world; and he proves this assertion from the virtuous actions of some of them; from the force of conscience, testifying their knowledge of such law; and from their private reasonings referring to its confessed authority. "In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." These two general



neral qualifications, which are here said to render men acceptable to the Deity, include the whole of piety and virtue; to endue mankind with these is the grand object, and, so far as relates to this world, the ultimate end, not only of the law of nature, but also of all revealed religion. These are the grand points on which hang all the law and the prophets. "This do," says our Lord, "and thou shalt live."

But however plain these two points of natural religion may appear to those who have the happiness to live in an age and country enlightened by revelation; it is evident that the first of them was very early impaired by ignorance, debased by superstition, and, at length, obliterated by idolatry. But into whatever errors men might fall concerning the knowledge and worship of the Deity, the obligation to work righteousness, or to be punctual in the performance of the personal and social duties of life, was always known and acknowledged. Bad as the heathen world was, it cannot be denied that the annals of both Greece and Rome furnish us with some noble and virtuous characters.

racters; but however deficient the heathens were in the practice of morality, their writings are a sufficient proof that they were not insensible to its obligation. In the works of many, and in the lives of some, we find temperance, justice, fortitude, benevolence, and the other virtues, which their moralists called offices, exhibited in their fairest forms, and emulating, as it were, even christian perfection.

As to their errors respecting the Deity, those certainly were without excuse who first introduced idolatry; "Who when they knew (or might have known) him as God, glorified him not as such, but changed the glory of the incorruptible Deity, into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds and to four-footed beasts, and to creeping things." But when superstition had exerted her degrading influence over the minds of men, and idolatry had long been established, could it be expected that reason, thus blinded by prejudice, and unassisted by revelation, should be sufficiently strong in the generality of mankind to raise them above the bias of education, the

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force of example, and the fetters of custom, to lead them, in opposition to these, into the knowledge of true religion ?

In a small number of wiser individuals reason exerted her utmost force and in some measure produced this effect. And as all the true worshippers of God have not exactly the same conceptions of his nature and attributes, so neither were all heathens equally idolaters. The characters of Socrates and Cicero, their high talents, the manner in which they applied them, the moral tendency of their writings, and the general beneficence of their conduct, confirm this opinion. They lamented the abject condition to which human nature was reduced, and by their immortal labours endeavoured to raise and ennoble it. Their veneration for virtue increased their ardour in the pursuit of truth ; and the event of their researches after truth, confirmed them in their regard for virtue.

It is granted, nevertheless, that these men, great and good as they were, reformed not their deluded countrymen, that though, in some of their writings, they opposed, yet in their

their practice they fell into the prevailing superstition. But let us place ourselves in their situation, and candidly consider what peculiar strength of mind, and fortitude of disposition, must be requisite to enable those who have no other than the light of reason to stem the torrent of popular prejudices, to sacrifice every thing that is dear, and even life itself, to the interests of religious truth.

Had these men been accepted of God in the manner Cornelius was, it may be presumed that they would gladly have embraced a religion so well calculated to remove their doubts, to enlighten their minds, to assure them of the pardon of their sins, and to animate them in holiness and virtue. To them however this offer was not made; but shall we therefore conclude that so far as they were honest and sincere, so far as they acted agreeably to the knowledge which they could attain, they were rejected of God? Far from us be such an illiberal supposition. God is not austere, expecting to reap where he has not sown, or to gather where he has not strewed. The righteous Judge of the world will render to every man accord-



ing to his works, and will bestow glory, honour and peace upon every man that worketh good, upon the Gentile as well as upon the Jew. These were sinners as well as we, and stood in absolute need of the pardoning mercy of God; but shall we conclude because they were not admitted into that gracious covenant by which forgiveness is the stipulated reward of faith and repentance, that they shall be excluded from all mercy? rashly to determine concerning the dealings of God with them ill becomes us; it is more consistent with our character as Christians to be grateful for our own superior privileges, and humbly to hope that the same mercy which vouchsafed to us the inestimable treasure of Gospel grace, will, in the manner and degree which divine wisdom alone can determine, be extended to all who, according to the light they have, fear God and work righteousness.

In whatever I have here said, far be it from me to represent an acceptance of the Gospel as unnecessary to salvation, or to assert that the imperfect characters of mankind are of themselves sufficient to claim  
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acceptance with the Deity. Whatever has been alleged in excuse of Heathen blindness, cannot possibly affect those "on whom the day spring from on high has dawned," and who live within the sound of the Gospel. These privileges will be either our greatest happiness or our most severe misfortune : which of these will be the event must depend upon ourselves, upon the choice we make, upon the conduct we pursue. Let not therefore the modern infidel shelter himself under the assertion of the text, till he is well assured that the character it describes is perfectly his own. But can he be said to fear God who disregards the truths proposed in his sacred name? The importance of the doctrines themselves, and the manner in which they are set forth, ought surely to excite a careful examination and respectful attention; and till after long and close application, till after deep researches and candid inquiries, till after the best exertion of our reason, unclouded by prejudice and unblinded by passion, can we reject them and yet flatter ourselves with impunity? and whoever takes these pains will find his assent to them most



firmly established. But have our modern unbelievers acted in this cautious manner? Are they, in general, men of a serious turn, of close application, of extensive knowledge even of philosophy? though to this they pretend. Are not the greater part of them men of business or of pleasure, whose pursuits divert their attention from these important subjects? If any are men of learning, have they not been dazzled by the glare of vivacity rather than enlightened by sober judgment; or involved in a gloomy scepticism which led them to doubt even their own existence? The infidelity of those who are not suffered to view Christianity, except through the false medium of Popery, excites not our wonder; but it is astonishing that Protestants, to whom it is presented in a rational and scriptural view, should let themselves be misled by the malignant misrepresentations of a Voltaire, or the uncomfortable scepticism of a Hume, rather than be guided by the superior knowledge and genius of a Boyle, an Addison, a Locke, and a Newton.

If from so good a man as Cornelius, the  
belief

belief and profession of the Gospel was required, we may infer that the best of us stand in need of Christianity, to secure the hope of glory and immortality from God, the rewarder of all who diligently seek him. However we may fear God and work righteousness, whatever may be our progress in piety and virtue, we are never so perfect in either of these respects as to claim acceptance from the Deity. The virtues even of the best are so often defective in principle, and counterbalanced with so many failings, that they need much forgiveness for the past, and much assistance for the future; and all who are duly sensible of this will gladly accept of those gracious terms which are offered in the Gospel, and seek God in the way he has there appointed. Would Cornelius have been excusable if he had refused to hearken to St. Peter, and if he had pleaded the merit of his piety and virtue, in opposition to the offers of pardon and assistance graciously made to him? Could he have maintained the character of one fearing God, after such a contemptuous rejection of the divine mercy? If reason teaches



that it is our duty to obey God, to what part even of natural religion could this centurion have pretended, after he had wilfully rejected the counsel of God, and acted in express opposition to the will of his Maker, declared in the vision from heaven? Such however is the alarming case of those who, born and educated in the Christian faith, despise and reject this faith, under pretence of adhering to natural religion. Cornelius was indeed favoured with a miraculous interposition of providence to effect his conversion; to us no angel descends, no apostles preach, no miracles are presented: to us however divine truth is offered in the Scriptures, with such accumulated weight of evidence as is amply sufficient to convince every sincere and humble mind. The voice of God is the same, however different be the means of communication: and so many are our opportunities of religious knowledge and improvement, that our ignorance and unbelief must be wilful inattention and obstinate perverseness. God, who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are but dust, will determine the final state of all  
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under whatever dispensation they may have lived, according to their conformity to his will, so far as they knew or were able to discover it. Their several degrees of advantage will be duly regarded, and the most equitable arrangement will take place. The Heathen who with no express assurance, and but the presumptive expectations of a future state, yet, through exalted piety or heroic benevolence, sacrificed the enjoyments of life, or even life itself, was certainly recommended to God upon grounds different from those on which a Christian is accepted. And those who were guilty of deviations from the law of reason, as the rule was less perfect, will have allowances made for them to which those under a clearer light can have no claim; but greater knowledge ought to be productive of greater improvement, and when we consider the general immorality of the heathen world, it may be reasonably hoped that Christians will excel them in piety and virtue in some proportion to the superior advantages they enjoy, and that thus attaining a much higher degree of holiness here, they may be blessed with a greater measure



measure of happiness hereafter. But if we reject the offers of divine mercy through Christ, if we repent not of our sins, and improve not the advantages we enjoy, the heathen world will rise up in judgment against us, and it will be "our condemnation that light is come into the world, but that we loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil."

To conclude, from the humane reflection in the text, let us learn to be charitable in our judgment of others. Of all species of injustice, that which, like the anathemas of the Church of Rome, condemns the souls of men without compunction, is the most horrid and barbarous. Let us act consistently with our character as Christians; let us leave our brethren to their own consciences, and unbelievers to the mercy of God. Far from presuming to determine their lot, let us humbly implore the common Father of mankind, that all who have embraced the faith may continue steadfast, and that those who are strangers to it may find acceptance through the compassion of their God and Redeemer.

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## S E R M O N V.

*Take, my brethren, the Prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience.*

JAMES V. 10.

**M**A N is so formed by nature, that examples, whether good or bad, have a great influence upon him. The bad indeed have more power to corrupt than the good to reform the world: nevertheless, upon all who are well disposed, good examples are not without a considerable effect; nor are even bad examples without their use. The sacred writings give us remarkable instances of both kinds; those of wickedness and impiety are pointed out as so many fatal rocks which we ought carefully to shun, while those of piety and virtue are set up as lights to direct our course.

Of the latter class there are four kinds proposed to us in the divine oracles. The first



first is the example of the adorable and ever blessed God, the center and source of all perfection. In proportion to their conformity to him, the goodness and excellence of all other beings are to be estimated. The next is that of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the brightness of his father's glory, and the express image of his person;" in him all the moral perfections of the Deity are softened and exhibited in our nature. From him therefore we are to learn what we ought to be, and how we ought to act, "walking as he walked," "having the same mind in us that was in him, and considering him who endured contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds." Next to him we ought to attend to the examples of the holy angels, whom we acknowledge it our duty to imitate when, according to the instructions of our divine master, we pray that the will of God "may be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are also called upon to regard the examples of men of like passions and frailties with ourselves who were distinguished for their piety and virtue. There are some  
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peculiar circumstances of usefulness and advantage attending each of these models, but it is to the latter kind of them that the text requires our attention. Though the example of Christ is, beyond comparison, most bright and illustrious, yet are we not to neglect that of any of the servants of God; and the Jewish prophets also, so far as their conduct was generally pious and virtuous; are here recommended to our attention. We are not indeed called upon to imitate them in those particulars which related to their prophetic office, nor even to follow them in all their actions, for in many things the conduct of some of them was highly blameable; but we are to resemble them in their pious deportment, especially in their steady faith concerning the objects of another world, in opposition to the temptations of this, and in their patience under afflictions, by which they were enabled to overcome their trials and to persevere in their duty amidst all the difficulties of their course.

This is the sum and purpose of the Apostle's advice, from which I shall take occasion to consider the advantage of attending

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to good examples as patterns for our imitation, and the encouragement we have to copy them in our own conduct.

Good examples in general tend to establish us in the belief of the infinite importance and advantages of true religion, which appears with most convincing evidence when, in the lives and actions of those who profess it, we behold a lovely counterpart of its divine doctrines and admirable precepts. By these means truth and virtue are realised, clothed as it were with a body, and made visible in the most attractive form. Examples of piety and virtue are striking demonstrations of the beauty and energy of the religious principles from which they flow. The cause is known by its effects, the fountain by its streams.

Good examples are further advantageous as they are corrective: they strongly operate upon the principles of an ingenuous shame, and therefore contribute to reform the vicious and to improve the virtuous. As the faults of a deformed object are most discernable and disgusting when placed near one that is beautiful, so vice and folly never appear

pear in all their odious shape and colours  
 till brought into comparison with wisdom  
 and virtue. Hence the sinner is alarmed:  
 his conscience reproaches him with the wise  
 choice and virtuous conduct of the good  
 man, as well as with his own folly and vice.  
 Even the man of virtue when he contem-  
 plates another who excels him either in the  
 general character of goodness, or in some  
 particular qualities or attainments, is hum-  
 bled under the sense of imperfections to  
 which perhaps he would otherwise have paid  
 but little attention. In this respect the ex-  
 amples of good men have an advantage be-  
 yond even that of Christ, all excellent and  
 perfect as it is. In him the most exalted  
 goodness appears not so wonderful, nor are  
 we, upon comparing our lives with his, lia-  
 ble to be so much concerned at the great  
 disparity between them, because he was the  
 Son of God in a sublime and unrivalled  
 sense, and endued with the spirit in the same  
 boundless measure. It is therefore highly  
 useful to contemplate imperfect mortals,  
 born in all respects like ourselves, set upon  
 our own level, and yet triumphing by faith  
 over



over all the temptations of the world; such examples of faith, patience and fortitude, under trials of innocence, piety and virtue are pointed out to us in the ancient prophets, and in the apostles of our blessed Lord and Saviour.

We may also observe that such good and amiable models are powerfully attractive. Their lustre is truly bright, their beauty truly alluring: they seize on our esteem, steal our affections, and so insinuate themselves into the soul as by insensible degrees to transform it into their own likeness. As the load-stone has not only an attractive virtue in itself, but also communicates it to the iron it touches, so good examples, seriously attended to, transfuse their own qualities into us, improve our tempers, reform our conduct, and render us in all respects better. Besides, the examples of those who have acquitted themselves well in their moral warfare, have an animating effect which infuses life, spirit and vigour, which inspires resolution and courage to encounter any difficulties that may occur in the way of duty. The single example of St. Paul, in a  
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time of persecution, was of admirable use to the cause of his blessed master. He tells us that "his bonds in Christ were manifest in all the palace and in all other places, and that many of the brethren waxing confident by his bonds were much more bold to speak the word of truth without fear."

When the sincere follower of Christ contemplates the illustrious patterns held up to him in Scripture, he will naturally be led to reflect that he is not single in the difficulties of the human race: he sees the examples of others before him, who, after having endured all the trials of a painful course, have now reached the goal, have "come off conquerors and more than conquerors, through him that loved and died to redeem them." Through the divine blessing and assistance he will determine to tread the same path, and, like them, despise the allurements and terrors of the world. Under the infirmities and pressures of the present state he will labour to bear up as they did; and though, while in this frail tabernacle, he may sometimes groan under his burden, he will earnestly endeavour to perform the duties, and

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to enjoy the satisfactions of religion; he will be as happy in meditation on God and Christ, and in the exercise of faith and hope, of devotion and virtue, as his circumstances will permit.

It is highly useful to attend not only to the patterns proposed in Scripture, but also to all those good examples which through any other means fall within the sphere of our knowledge; more particularly of such persons as have been persecuted for righteousness sake, and have with heroic fortitude borne witness to the truth in the face of sufferings and death. These lead back our thoughts to those glorious martyrs of the earlier ages of Christianity, whom Scripture has rendered immortal; they are admirable confirmations of those relations, and tend not only to revive their impressions upon the mind, but also to render them deeper. They prove that our blessed Lord has not withdrawn his protection from his church, but has, even in the most degenerate times, some faithful and sincere followers, who believe and trust in him as their Saviour, obey him as their Lord and master, imitate him as  
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their pattern, and openly confess him before men. Such instances, being nearer and more familiar to us than those of ancient times, generally make a stronger impression upon us, render us more ashamed of our inferiority, and excite a generous emulation and ardour in the exertion of our moral powers.

If we have borne any particular relation to persons eminent for piety and virtue, their examples ought to be peculiarly beneficial to us. It may be presumed that, by our greater affection and regard for such endeared friends, we shall be better prepared to receive the influence of their good examples. If we have had the benefit of their instructions and reproofs, of their admonitions, prayers and counsels, we shall be the more inexcusable if we are not disposed to resemble them. To be so happily circumstanced without receiving improvement from our advantages, will argue the utmost depravity of heart. The sin of Eli's sons was great in departing from the way in which they had been trained by him, but it received additional aggravation from the pat-



tern of piety and virtue which their father had exhibited in the whole of his life.

Again, though living examples have this advantage that they are continually before our view, and therefore cannot easily be overlooked or forgotten, yet upon some other accounts, the examples of our pious friends and acquaintance who are removed out of the world by death, are more likely to be regarded and followed. It is a just observation of a Roman Poet, "that from  
"envy men often flight the virtue while it is  
"present, which they ought to prize, and  
"yet when it is removed, praise it and lament its loss."\* That envy which would not suffer them to do justice to superior merit while living dies together with the object of it, and is succeeded by love and veneration. Death stamps a kind of sacred character upon deceased virtue, and draws a veil over any little blemishes that might before have dimmed the brightness of its lustre; as in a noble statue or fine piece of painting,

\* "Virtutem incolumem odimus,

Sublatam ex oculis quærimus invidi."

HOR. *Lib. 3. Od. 15.*

painting, in which the just rules of proportion are observed, all those rough touches or inequalities that displeased the eye when it was viewed too near, vanish at once when it is placed at a proper distance.

Eminent examples of piety and virtue, whether near or more remote, are like lights set up in the world for the direction of mankind in general, and for the comfort of the good: some of these, like the luminaries of heaven, extend their influence to all nations and times. Such are Scripture examples, among which that of our blessed Lord shines like the sun in the firmament of heaven; others are of more contracted influence, and, with respect to mankind, are sooner extinguished, though they shall shine for ever in the kingdom of their Father. We ought to be thankful for every good example that comes within our knowledge, and to oppose them to those sinful ones with which the world abounds, in order to preserve ourselves from the general contagion, chusing rather to imitate a few that do well, than to follow a giddy multitude to do evil.



In order to induce us to imitate those excellent examples which are held forth to us in Scripture, or which by any other means come within the circle of our knowledge, let us attend to the following encouraging considerations.

We serve the same God and Father. He who was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Moses, and of all the pious prophets, is the God of his people now. He has been their friend and refuge in all past ages, and will be so to the remotest periods of time. With regard to those who have lived since the gospel, we may observe that we serve not only the same God, but also the same Redeemer even Jesus Christ, who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He is as deserving of the zeal and fidelity of his servants now, as ever, has the same blessings treasured up in himself, the same power in heaven, and the same care of his people here on earth. If we cultivate repentance and faith, piety and virtue, we have the same hopes of acquiring his favour, for he is "no respecter of persons," but in every nation they who fear God and  
"work

"work righteousness will be accepted of  
"him."

Another encouraging circumstance is that we profess the same doctrine, in general, even with those who lived before the time of Christ. We acknowledge with them that "God is, and that he is the rewarder of all  
"who diligently seek him; that without this  
"faith it is impossible to please him." We own that we are "pilgrims and strangers  
"here," that "we have no continuing city"  
in this world, "but seek one to come," and that we must pursue our journey to it in the paths of piety and virtue. We differ from them only in those things, in which they would cheerfully have agreed with us, had they been so happy as to have known them. Indeed we cannot so properly be said to *differ from*, as to *go beyond*, and in point of advantage to soar above them. And with regard to those who have lived since the discovery of the Gospel we may well say we profess the same doctrine with them. The doctrine of Christ, which made such a change in the world is not lost. For though the first preachers and professors of it are



long since dead the truth still survives, and will for ever survive them. The doctrines of the gospel were indeed spoken before they were written, but the things delivered were the same, and have an equal right to claim our attention. As to the miracles that accompanied the first propagation of the Gospel, they were intended only to gain believers to it as a divine revelation, and therefore when they had answered this end they were no longer needed. We may say of them, in general, what the Apostle Paul does of tongues, "they are for a sign, not unto them that believe, but unto them who believe not." Why then should not this holy religion, when men have free access to the fountains of Scripture knowledge, bring forth the fruits which it produced in the beginning, nay such as since that time it has actually produced in many who had not better opportunities than we have of being acquainted with "the truth as it is in Jesus."

Again, we are blessed with the same assistance, we are favoured with the same outward means and institutions, we are blessed with the public worship of God, the benefit  
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of prayer, of the preaching his word, and of the administration of the sacraments; we have moral and religious treatises in abundance, doctrinal, practical and devotional. Nor is there any want of internal assistance and consolation that either our own weakness, the irregularity of our passions, or the temptations with which we are encompassed may render necessary to fortify and encourage us in our Christian course. The sincere followers of our Lord have his gracious promise to assure them that their aids will be proportioned to their necessities, that God will lay no burden upon them but what he will help them to bear; will permit no temptation to befall them, in the way of their duty, but what he will assist them to overcome; nor expect any degree of perfection from them but what he will empower them to attain. The same grace that operated so effectually on the first Christians, even in the greatest of the Apostles, shall be mighty also, though in a different manner, towards the meanest faithful disciple of Christ, whose wants demand it, and who is careful not to receive it in vain.

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To conclude all, let it be considered that we have the promise and expectation of the same reward with them.

In this respect we have greatly the advantage of the Jewish prophets, who, like all the other servants of God before the publication of the Gospel, beheld the promises afar off, through the dim twilight of ritual and ceremonial shadows; but these are now happily dispersed, and the grand promise of life and immortality, which comprehends all the rest, is brought to light by the Gospel. When the Apostle Paul was "ready to be offered, and the time of his departure was at hand," he comforts himself and triumphs in the near view of his dissolution, in a strain truly pious and heroic: "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give unto me in that day;" and that the sincere followers of Christ in all future ages might not think these consolations were peculiar to him, he immediately adds, "and not unto me only but unto all them also that love his appearance."

“pearing,” so as seriously and diligently to prepare for it. In other races all run, but one only receiveth the prize, but in the Christian course every competitor who runs with faith and patience the race that is set before him, is certain of conquering and of being crowned. And surely the prize is richly worth contending for! We learn from the history of ancient Greece, and also from several allusions to it in many parts of St. Paul’s Epistles, that they who strove for mastery in the Olympic games were obliged in their preparatory exercises to exert much patience, temperance, and self-denial; this they did, as the Apostle observes, to obtain a corruptible crown: corruptible indeed! being only a wreath of olive, parsley or laurel; whereas the Christian is called to contend for one that is incorruptible, and by way of glorious eminence styled a crown of life. And shall not this reward, and the example of those pious persons who have gained it animate and encourage us? Shall we not be excited to piety and virtue when we recollect that glorious cloud of witnesses who have gone before us in the same way



way that we are invited to follow, "who through faith and patience inherit the promises?" God forbid that we should be indolent and lifeless in these infinitely important pursuits, when the meanest, and often, alas! the most hurtful trifle of this world shall render us all fervour and activity. Attentively therefore let us eye all the good examples with which we are acquainted, especially those recorded in the divine word, that by carefully observing the noble and virtuous manner in which others acquitted themselves, we may catch a portion of that heavenly ardour which animated them, that after having shared in the necessary and honourable toils of their conflict, we may at length be made partakers of their victory, and of the everlasting honours prepared for us by our forerunner and Lord in the mansions of his Father's house.

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## S E R M O N VI.

*And the Lord blessed the latter end of Job  
more than his beginning. JOB xliii. 12.*

THE book of Job has always been admired by persons of taste, as one of the most beautiful remains of oriental writing, which the lapse of time and the vicissitudes of human things have suffered to descend to us. Some have denied the narration it contains to be historical; but no one ever denied it to be interesting, affecting, and in the highest degree instructive; and, though we should consider it merely as a poetical composition, designed to convey the noblest lessons of morality, in the most pleasing dress that fancy and invention can bestow; it is still worthy of our attention, on account of the utility of its design and the beauty of its composition. But though there may be some circumstances in it which cannot be understood literally as facts, and  
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which therefore seem to give the whole an air of fiction; yet the general colouring of the characters, both principal and subordinate, is so agreeable to truth and nature, as to indicate their being taken from real life. The most probable opinion therefore is, that the story is founded in fact, but embellished by imagination according to the general practice of the ancient poets, who seldom invented their plots, but took them from the records or traditions of history, and made such alterations as were necessary to render them dramatic, or to embellish them with poetical machinery. However this may be, the character of Job is beautiful and instructive; it may always be contemplated with delight and admiration. He is introduced to us as one of the richest men in all the east; his family powerful, his substance great, his influence extensive. This situation, to a man of unstable principles and wavering virtue, might have been fraught with temptation. We must not be so misled by the romantic notions of the simplicity of pastoral life as to ascribe to the patriarchal ages, perpetual innocence and peace. In

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an extensive country, partially inhabited, and subject to no settled law, a state so happy can never long have place. Some Sabæans or Chaldeans there will always be; some wandering tribes, excited either by avarice or a spirit of enterprise, to make depredations on their quiet neighbours, till, inured to the trade of war, they hate and forsake all other occupation, and depend for their sustenance on rapine and violence. Hence devastation and barbarity invade and profane the peaceful regions, which, by nature, seemed formed for the abodes of simplicity and happiness. By his wealth and the number of his dependents, Job was well qualified for such enterprises, and, had he been one who set at nought the sufferings of his fellow-creatures, he might no doubt have acquired dominion in the extensive regions of the east, and have become a mighty sovereign. He was, however, what is infinitely more noble, a Good Man. His heart would not allow him to be the cause of woe: he loved more to alleviate and remove misery than to create it: "He delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless  
" and



"and the helpless." "The blessing of him  
 "that was ready to perish came upon him,  
 "and he caused the widow's heart to sing  
 "for joy: he was a father to the poor; he  
 "was eyes to the blind, and feet to the  
 "lame." How amiable is this character:  
 how much superior, in the eyes of reason  
 and humanity, to those ambitious heroes  
 who desolate the earth and drench it in  
 blood; who are so engrossed with the pur-  
 suit of power as scarcely to have a sigh for  
 woe, or a tear for misery! who can coolly  
 sacrifice the lives of their fellow-creatures;  
 who can contemplate with unconcern the  
 ruin and destruction which their plans oc-  
 casion, and even exult over scenes of car-  
 nage and cruelty! Yet such are the men  
 whom prejudice and opinion style great!  
 Such were too many of the Princes who have  
 reigned over mankind, who have been ex-  
 tolled by flatterers, and servilely obeyed by  
 slaves. Yet surely this is fatal greatness!  
 How different the man of benevolence! Se-  
 rene and mild; happy in himself, and wish-  
 ing all others so, his heart is open as the air,  
 and warm as the sun, which cheers and  
 blesses

blesse all around. Compare this character with that of the stern and ruthless conqueror, who, grasping at whole nations, thinks private distress beneath his notice, and, intoxicated with his elevation, overlooks the numberless miseries by which he has risen so high! The heart that can prefer the latter of these characters, must be that of a demon, whose delight is to curse mankind with all the depth of woe.

Job lived long in prosperous virtue; but virtue in prosperity is neither secure nor complete. It is a plant that, to thrive in this sublunary soil, must not always bask in the sun-shine: the adverse storm is useful to harden and give it deeper root. Sudden and dreadful was that which burst upon the head of Job. We see him in one short day despoiled of all his rich possessions, and, what to a heart so good must have been still more afflicting, deprived of all his children by one calamitous blow; but, as if this complication of external misfortunes, as if these troubles, assailing him on every side, had been insufficient for the trial of his integrity, his flesh is infected with a grievous

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and painful disease. Our sympathy and sorrow are now as deeply engaged as were before our admiration and esteem. We enter into the sad reverse of this good man's fortune, we feel for him lying in the dust, in nakedness, in want, in pain of body, and distress of mind. The discourses which pass between him and his friends in this piteous situation are replete with the noblest instruction: they are an inexhaustible mine of sound morality, and deep observation on human life. Even the acrimonious expressions introduced in some of Job's speeches, which appear to favour of impatience, only tend to attach us more closely to him: they serve as delicate strokes to heighten the picture, and give it that exquisite finish on which the truth of character depends.

Were his complaints the mere wailings of despondency, we might suspect his feelings. If he complained not at all, but rather gloried in his calamities, we should censure his character as unnatural and affected. We should then take no part in his distress; for even the sublimest virtue, devoid of the feelings of human nature, could not engage our  
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sympathy : but while we see him alive to all his woes, yet resigned to that great and good Being by whom they are inflicted, carrying his patience to the extreme verge of humanity, yet still retaining all the feelings of a man; we become interested in every word, action and circumstance that tends to bring on the catastrophe. The catastrophe at length arrives, wrought up with every touch of the pathetic and sublime, that can catch the attention or captivate the heart. The supreme Being himself is introduced demonstrating the ignorance and weakness of man, and consequently his inability to determine concerning the fitness and equity of the various events appointed by providence. A copious account is given by this heavenly speaker of his own most amazing works, with strong and beautiful descriptions of various particulars among them. In the conclusion, Job's friends are reprov'd for the unadvised severity of their reasonings; most honourable testimony is borne to the rectitude of Job himself; he is rais'd from the abyfs of misery to splendour, far exceeding what he had before enjoyed; every



possession and blessing is doubled to him; he lives long respected, and dies in a venerable and happy old age.

In reviewing this story with a design of drawing from it lessons of instruction, the difficulty lies not in the discovery, but in the selection of materials. Every page teems with sentences that speak at once to the understanding and to the heart; every incident and change of fortune have in them something monitory, and there is hardly a case in the ordinary course of human life in which one might not advantageously consult the character of Job for advice.

Prosperity is the object of all human pursuits and desires; but of all human acquisitions it is the most difficult to be borne. "Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together," and where prosperity is, a crowd of temptations will be hovering around. In a prosperous state, in that state which, with all its dangers, will always be most desired, the conduct of Job is held forth as a pattern. Let the rich and the happy learn from him moderation in the enjoyments which affluence places within their

their reach, a total abstinence from all oppression, and a constant attention to exertions of generosity and charity. Let them beware of wrapping themselves up in the selfish security of their own importance, hardened against the feelings of their neighbour's distress, dead to every joy that dignifies the nature of man, and alive to nothing but sensual pleasure. Miserable perversion this of heaven's best blessings! to employ that which might purchase the bliss of angels in the abuse and debasement even of humanity, till it is sunk to a level with the brutes that perish.

But even while their conscience bears witness to the general rectitude of their designs and actions, let them not set their hearts too much on what they possess; neither riches, nor children, nor dearest friends are given to man by perpetual tenure, and that man is but ill prepared to bear a reverse of fortune who never imagined such a reverse possible. Reason therefore must frequently represent the instability of all earthly things, which will teach us both to use them well, and to bear the loss of them with



derency. Virtue cannot always prevent the assaults of calamity, but it may administer strength and fortitude to support them. The integrity and benevolence of Job could not hinder the roving free-booters of the east from plundering his wealth; the lightning from destroying his servants; the hurricane from overwhelming his children; nor disease from invading his own flesh; but the sweet remembrance of them could inspire him with vigour to bear all these miseries with an exalted degree of patience. In this view his example is invaluable.

It is not the lot of all to be intrusted with riches and power; but it is the lot of every one to suffer some portion of distress. The uses of these afflictive dispensations are innumerable and often unknown; but this we well know, that murmurs and complaints are utterly vain: they may aggravate but cannot remove the incumbent woe. How much better is it, how much more becoming those who profess to believe a Divine Providence, which dispenses both prosperity and affliction, according to the dictates of infinite wisdom and goodness, to bear with  
humble

humble submission those distresses which no human power can either prevent or remove. In such resignation there is something noble and meritorious, and its consequences will prove it the wisest choice.

A man of extreme sensibility indeed, on the first onset of calamity cannot always preserve an unruffled mind; he may be tempted to resent the stroke which he thinks undeserved, or even like Job to curse the day of his birth, and to wish he had dropped from his cradle into his grave. But this torrent of passion soon subsides; it is as the bursting forth of confined waters; the turbulence is soon over, and the stream runs smooth and clear: he will deeply humble himself before that awful Being, whose judgments no force can resist, whose counsels no wisdom can search out: he will adore the invisible hand which, for some good cause unknown to him, removes what perhaps constituted the sole felicity of his life: he will consecrate his sufferings to heaven, and implore God to accept of them as an atonement for his secret crimes: he will search into every corner of his heart, banish every



lurking vice, cast out every unworthy desire, and establish fair virtue as in full possession there. The man who thus improves the visitations of adversity shall be indeed the blessed of the Lord, and his latter end shall be made greater than his beginning. Death shall waft him to those happy regions where no robbers plunder, no lightnings blast, no storms overwhelm; or smiling prosperity shall once more return to raise his head, and bid him flourish again among the sons of men. In either case he is blessed. If he dies, his virtues, his sufferings, his patience become exemplary, and his memory is held dear: if he lives, the pains he has borne will inspire sympathy with others in distress, and excite him to a perpetual desire of communicating happiness, which, naturally returning upon himself, will afford him an inexhaustible fund of the purest enjoyments a worthy heart can know; and when life is ended he shall step out of this world, where his virtue is honoured and beloved, into another, where it shall be confirmed and crowned with everlasting happiness.

But, to Christians, I cannot conclude the  
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admonitions and exhortations which naturally arise from the history we have been contemplating, without a few observations on the peculiar and great advantages which are derived from the Gospel. Whoever Job was, whensoever, or by whomsoever his story was compiled, we know that it was long previous to the glorious dispensation of light, which we have the happiness to enjoy; and though to "that light of reason, which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world," it is reasonable to suppose that some kind of revelation of the divine will might have been superadded, in the case of so venerable and excellent a character, yet he had not the example of a suffering Saviour set before his eyes; he had not the precepts of his wisdom by which to regulate his behaviour, nor the express promises of life and immortality to counterbalance the evils of time. His appreciation of a present life could not have been as just, nor his views of a future state as clear, as those we possess. If, then, in the absence of such advantages, Job exhibits to our view so illustrious an example of patience and resignation,



tion, of humility and piety, will he not hereafter rise up in judgment against many Christians and condemn them? Where will be the hiding place of those professing disciples of their Lord, who have neither been temperate in prosperity, nor liberal in affluence, nor patient in pain and sorrow, nor resigned in adversity? Will not such, if now they have the temerity to call themselves "children of the kingdom," be finally disowned and cast out, and see the rewards of it bestowed on those alone who have been holy not in word only, but in deed?

May all the examples and exhortations to virtue, which we meet with in the Old and New Testament, "which were written for "our instruction," produce in us the fruits of good living, as "without holiness no one "shall see the Lord."

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## S E R M O N VII.

*Hallowed be thy name.* MATT. vi. 9.

**I**T must occur to all who are acquainted with human nature, that familiarity, even with those things which are in themselves most excellent, is apt to diminish our attention to them. This is but too much the case even with our religious services, and the observation has often been applied as an argument against forms of prayer. To enter upon the discussion of this question would be foreign to our present subject, I shall therefore only observe, that, even allowing to the objection all the validity that can be demanded, it is abundantly compensated by many obvious advantages. But the objection, if applicable to forms of human composition, is not less so to that most excellent model of devotion, commonly called the Lord's Prayer; and much is it to be feared that, in consequence of frequently repeating it,



it, many pronounce it without that attention to its comprehensive meaning which ought to accompany it. It is true that we have a short, but excellent, explanation of it in our Church Catechism, which might be sufficient for instruction; but as the intent of preaching is not so much to inform men of what they do not know, as to remind them of that with which they are already acquainted, but of which, from the various pursuits of the world, they are too apt to be negligent and forgetful, there can be no impropriety in the preacher's occasionally reminding them of topics which, though to some they may appear trite and common, are in themselves of infinite importance, and may be highly useful to a Christian audience, as they may prevent their worship from degenerating into the mere service of the lips, in which the understanding is unengaged and the heart unaffected.

With this view it is proper, at different times, to direct our attention, not only to the general intention and scope of the Lord's Prayer, but also to the meaning of some of its petitions. That on which I now wish to engage

engage your thoughts is so short, but at the same time so comprehensive, that without some guide we may probably not understand its full extent. In order therefore to assist you in this I shall endeavour to explain its meaning, and to deduce some practical inferences from it.

As our blessed Lord placed love to God at the head of the moral duties, and declared it to be "the first and great commandment," so in his excellent prayer the first petitions which we are directed to present, are those which relate to God and religion; and among these that which intreats that the name of God may be hallowed or sanctified, claims the foremost rank.

As our Lord was addressing himself to those of the Jews, whose acquaintance with letters was confined to the books of the Old Testament, it was not only natural but highly proper that he should adapt his instruction to their capacities, by using expressions which were borrowed from their sacred writings with which they were familiar.

Of this kind are the expressions in this petition: the word to *hallow* or *sanctify* was used



used by the Jews, when applied to persons or things, to signify separating them from the common purposes of life, and devoting them to religious uses; but when applied to the supreme Being, it acquired a more comprehensive meaning, and signified the adoration, homage and praise due to the Deity. It is of the same import with the phrase *to glorify God*, that is, to celebrate his perfections, and to render him those honours which he so richly deserves from us. He is represented as saying to Aaron, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people will I be glorified;" and he declares by his prophet Ezekiel, "Behold, I am against thee, O Zidon, and I will be glorified in the midst of thee, and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall have executed judgment in her, and shall be sanctified in her."

The *name of God* is also a Hebrew expression, which is variously used by the writers of the Old Testament. Sometimes it stands for the Deity himself: thus, to praise, to call upon, and to bless the name of God, is to celebrate the praises, to intreat the protection,

tection, and to offer the tribute of a grateful heart to God himself.

In this sense to hallow the name of the Deity, is to worship the one true God in opposition to the idols of the heathens, to acknowledge him as creator, preserver and governor of all things; hence in the 44th Psalm, "to forget the name of our God," is used as synonymous to the expression of "stretching out our hands to a strange god;" and signifies an apostacy from the worship of the true God to that of idols.

In other places the name of God is used to signify the infinite perfections or attributes of the Deity; his goodness, his knowledge, his wisdom, his mercy, his truth, his fidelity, his power, his omnipresence and his providence. In this sense David says, "they that know thy name," that is all thy perfections, "will put their trust in thee."

According to this meaning of the word, to hallow the name of God is to form just ideas of the divine Being, to acknowledge his perfections, and zealously to embrace every opportunity of making them known to our fellow-creatures; to declare to mankind



kind that "there is none good but one, that  
 "is God;" that "he is the blessed and only  
 "potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of  
 "lords, who only hath immortality dwell-  
 "ling in light unto which no man can ap-  
 "proach, whom no man hath seen or can  
 "see, to whom be honour and power ever-  
 "lasting."

By the name of God is sometimes meant  
 that religion which he hath revealed to man.  
 Thus "the place which God hath chosen to  
 "set his name there," meant that which he  
 had appointed for the rites of the religion he  
 had revealed by Moses; and the apostle  
 Paul tells the first Christians "that the name  
 "of God," that is the religion of Christ, "is  
 "blasphemed among the Gentiles through  
 "their immoral conduct."

To hallow the name of God signifies  
 therefore to persevere in the profession of  
 the Gospel of Christ, and to adorn this doc-  
 trine by all our conduct; to "walk honestly,  
 "giving none occasion to the adversary to  
 "speak reproachfully," and to "make our  
 "light so shine before men that they may  
 "glorify our father who is in heaven."

Lastly,

Lastly, to sum up all that has been said, we may observe that in this petition we express our most fervent and sincere desire that "all men should attain to the knowledge of the truth," should acknowledge the "only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent," and should form just ideas of his perfections; that every tongue should praise and every knee bow before him; that all intelligent beings should know, serve and obey him; that all nations, and particularly those with which we are connected, should fear his power and worship his adorable excellence, should venerate his wisdom, should love his goodness, should trust in his promises and rely upon his mercy; that all mankind may learn and profess his true religion, and live in a manner conformable to their faith, their knowledge and their hope.

From what has been said of this petition, it is evident that it supposes several important duties to be performed by us, and that when we present it we lay ourselves under an obligation to discharge them. To offer this prayer and not to reflect on the duties which it imposes upon us, would be a most

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impious mockery of the Most High; and yet it is much to be feared that this petition is often pronounced as a mere form of words, without attending to the obligations which we thereby acknowledge and renew.

Let it however be observed that when we are commanded to pray that the name of God may be hallowed, we are not to imagine that the glory, the honour and happiness of the divine Being can either be increased by the worship or diminished by the ungrateful neglect of insignificant mortals. "Look unto the heavens and see, behold the clouds which are higher than thou! "If thou sinnest what dost thou against him? "or if thy transgressions be multiplied what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous "what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man; but can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect?" His glo-

ry and happiness, like all his other perfections, are infinite and immutable. He ever was, he is, and ever will be the same, whether he be adored or neglected by his creatures. When therefore intelligent beings are exhorted to glorify God, it must be understood only with relation to themselves, and their fellow-creatures, to whom they may celebrate his perfections. By this we improve our own dispositions and may promote the improvement of others; but nothing could be more absurdly impious than for the greatest of the sons of man, who is a mere worm of the dust, to suppose that he could contribute any thing to increase the glory, or augment the happiness of the unchangeable God. It is for our sakes alone that the Deity requires us to praise and adore him, and the command itself is an instance of his goodness towards us. For if we know, celebrate and adore his glorious attributes, we shall be rendered more perfect and more happy by this noblest employment of our minds, which will be elevated, purified and improved in all their faculties. Man will hereby become acquainted with the true



beauty of virtue and goodness, and with the source of all perfection; if he contemplates these sublime subjects aright, he will not fail to find his affections powerfully engaged, and his inclination excited to conform his conduct to that model of perfection which he will constantly keep in view. How happy would human society become if proper and lively notions of the divine attributes were impressed upon every mind, and penetrated every heart! It would then be like that of the blessed inhabitants of heaven: man would then be good, just, merciful and true, in humble imitation of his heavenly father. We should then be happy even in this world, as the result of our own perfection, and that of all around us. Moral evil, with all its train of dreadful consequences, would then, instead of disturbing mankind, be banished from the earth. But though such a perfect state of innocence and virtue cannot be expected in this dispensation of trial and probation, yet the more the name of God is hallowed, the nearer will be our approach towards it; and certainly whatever brings us at all nearer to such a state of

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felicity must be in the utmost degree desirable; it is therefore our highest interest that the Deity should be known and truly sanctified by us all, and especially by those with whom our lot is cast in the connections either of civil or domestic society. Hence when we offer the petition "Hallowed be thy name!" we pray for the promotion of our own safety and happiness.

God manifests himself to man as to an intelligent and moral agent by the dictates of reason, and conscience; by his works of creation, and by the dispensations of his providence. Within us we have a principle of light and truth, which leads us up to the Supreme Being, and without us a vast volume is opened to our view, which all may peruse: there, in plain yet sublime characters, are traced the most striking instances of the omnipotence, the infinite knowledge, wisdom and goodness of him, who made all things by his power and preserves all things by his providence. How stupid and negligent must they be who do not perceive the wonders of divine bounty! How ungrateful those who enjoy them

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without attending to them! How obstinately presumptuous those whom, when they are capable of perceiving them, they do not lead back to the grand First Cause, from which all secondary causes derive their relation and efficacy! Contemplate the earth on which we dwell with the other worlds, which surround the sun (which is a million of times greater than our earth), and describe revolutions so constant and regular as to astonish those the most, who have most diligently studied them. Consider the fixed stars placed at various, yet to us immeasurable distances, some of them surpassing the sun in magnitude, and giving light and heat to planetary systems like ours. Imagination is lost and bewildered in the contemplation of works so immense, that, when compared with the vast universe, our sun, with all the planets which roll around it, is but as a grain of sand on the shore in proportion to the earth. But the power, wisdom and goodness of the Creator are not less evident in the most minute, than in the greatest of his works. The microscope discovers a new world of

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wonders. The structure of the smallest insect, which to the naked eye appears an indivisible point, is not less astonishing than that of the largest animal. We there discern a variety, and connection of bodily organs so admirably adapted to the mode of life, and an apparatus so exquisitely suited to the manner of subsistence appointed for these diminutive beings, that nothing less than infinite wisdom and power could have contrived and created them. A celebrated naturalist of this country \* asserts that he has observed living insects so small that a hundred million of them together scarcely equalled the magnitude of a grain of sand.

Whence comes it then that the name of God is not hallowed by all his creatures? Is it possible that there can be real atheists, who coolly and deliberately deny the existence of a first intelligent Cause? Alas! it is but too true, that such have been found in nations highly civilized, and among the higher ranks in these. But what is more astonishing, even among those who have explored all the depths of science, and have adorned their minds with all the riches of



human literature, some have been so blinded by their pride as "*to say in their hearts, 'There is no God!'*" This would not be surprizing in ignorant uncultivated savages; and yet even the most uncivilized nations seem, amidst all the superstition and idolatry to which they are enslaved, to have some faint ideas of an intelligent Cause, which however absurd and erroneous are still more rational than the gross self-delusions of atheism.

But, alas! the name of God is far from being truly known and sanctified even among many who profess to believe in the revelation of his word, and to be the disciples of the Saviour. In how large a part of the christian world is the gospel debased by the vain traditions of men! and how many are there on whom, instead of the rational doctrines and simple duties of the New Testament, are imposed the belief of unintelligible mysteries, and the practice of vain and often idolatrous ceremonies! But, perhaps, it will be contended that such superstition is infinitely preferable to atheism; that, except in extraordinary cases which,

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comparatively speaking, seldom occur, it  
 neither dissolves the obligations of morality,  
 nor loosens the ties of society; that by pre-  
 serving order and subordination, it, in a  
 great measure, answers the ends of true re-  
 ligion, and that from the change which  
 during this century has taken place in the  
 opinions of mankind, there is little danger  
 of the overwhelming tyranny of supersti-  
 tion, or of its propagating its tenets by fire  
 and sword. We grant all this. We allow  
 that the errors of the head have not always  
 an immediate influence on the affections of  
 the heart; and that, even among those who  
 from ignorance are attached to the most su-  
 perstitious tenets and practices, there are  
 many pious and virtuous individuals, who  
 to the best of their knowledge serve God in  
 the manner they sincerely believe to be most  
 acceptable to him; yet, as Protestants, we  
 cannot but deplore the prevalence of super-  
 stition, because, from the experience both  
 of past and present times, we are persuaded  
 that it is fatal to true and vital religion, and  
 that it tends to promote atheism and infideli-  
 ty. In a church which prohibits all free in-  
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quiry, and tolerates no departure from its dictates, they, whose minds are too much enlightened not to see the absurdity of many of its tenets, have no opportunity of better instruction; the doubts which are first suggested by those things which, though of human invention, they have always been taught to consider as inseparably connected with the gospel, are easily extended to the whole of christianity, which hence they contemplate with indifference and contempt, as fit only to keep vulgar minds in subjection: Thus they gradually lose a sense of all religious obligation, and become the slaves of those vicious inclinations, which they can indulge without being obnoxious to human laws, till at length the licentiousness of their conduct confirms the unbelief which had given rise to it. Never having dared to propose their first doubts as matters of serious investigation, they now vent their infidelity in oblique insinuations and sarcastic hints, which are recommended to the gay and thoughtless by the graces of composition and the liveliness of wit; and their effect illustrates the promptitude with which  
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the human mind, when once certain principles are relaxed, flies from the extreme of credulity to the opposite extreme of infidelity. Should a country, in which this contempt of religion and morals prevails among the great, undergo any revolution, by which the discipline of its church is abolished, and the restraints of the former government removed, what can be expected but that the incredulity of the more enlightened, and the licentiousness of the great, should be diffused among all the inferior ranks of men; or that the reign of superstition should be immediately supplanted by that of irreligion and immorality. The first part of this picture is realized in the religious state of many Roman Catholic countries, and particularly in that of France before the late revolution; the latter in the present circumstances of that distracted nation.

But even among Protestants there are too many who do not properly know and sanctify the name of God: too many who, indifferent to personal sincerity and conviction in religion, consider it merely with respect to political utility, and are zealous for the



the protestant religion here, upon no other principles than those on which they would promote popery at Rome or Mahometanism in Turkey; merely because it happens to be the religion of the state. Now, though we are deeply persuaded of the valuable effects of religion on the morals and manners of a people, and of its efficacy in preserving order, subordination and peace in civil society, and though we acknowledge that on these, and also on many other accounts, we sincerely wish to see it universally flourish; yet let it be observed, that they who look no further than these political effects of religion, are not very likely to be animated by its genuine spirit, or to be much influenced by it in their conduct. They will soon be led to think it a restraint rather for others than for themselves, will become regardless of its sentiments, negligent of its duties, offended when ever it reproves their own failings and faults, and in short deem it fit only for the instruction of the illiterate and the vulgar. The exception of ourselves from what we are willing to impose upon others is so flattering to human pride and weakness, that

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we are apt to fall into it before we are aware, and therefore we cannot be too much upon our guard against it. Hence it cannot be too often inculcated upon every individual that his religion, properly speaking, is the result, not of his civil or even of his social relations, but, of that grand relation in which he stands to his almighty Creator, who sees his heart, who knows his thoughts, and will judge of the sincerity of his intentions. It is a concern not between man and man, but between God and man. It cannot therefore consist in mere external profession; but must be founded in conviction, must be approved by the understanding, and be felt by the heart; must regulate the affections, and thence influence the whole of the temper and conduct. Where there is this amiable sincerity of mind even error becomes harmless, and the name of God is truly sanctified even by those who are mistaken in some of the opinions they form of him; but where this is wanting, even truth is of no avail. The religion of such a man consists in mere external observances, in the profession of doctrines he has never  
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examined, and of sentiments which he has never cultivated.

Our blessed Saviour tells us that "the servant who knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." How dangerous then is the case of those who, when they have opportunities of knowing and serving God, neglect these and live in a state of practical atheism; or who, while perhaps from custom or decency, they sometimes attend the public ordinances of religion, and pronounce the petition of our text, dishonour the name of the Deity by their life and conduct, being the voluntary slaves of their corrupt appetites and passions, and are so engrossed by the love of pleasure and dissipation, or of wealth and power, as to live almost without God in the world!

In order to avoid this danger let us ever remember that the best and most unequivocal way in which we can sanctify the name  
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of God, is by sanctifying ourselves; by manifesting the sincerity of our faith in the purity of our conduct; by "letting our light" so shine before men that they, seeing our "good works, may glorify our father who "is in heaven." A truly pious and virtuous example is the most efficacious means of promoting the honour of God, and of inducing those who behold it to join in hallowing his holy name. Be meek and humble, humane and beneficent, just and faithful, moderate and temperate, and they who behold these virtues will be led to admire and acknowledge the holy religion which inspires them, and to venerate the almighty source of light and truth from whom it flows. Thus will the name of God be hallowed by us on earth; and thus, when his kingdom shall be fully come, we shall be fitted to become subjects of it, and to join the blessed inhabitants of heaven in performing his holy will, and shall enjoy life and happiness eternal.

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 happiness eternal.

## S E R M O N VIII.

*To the unknown God.* ACTS xvii. 23.

**A**THERNS, the scene of the transaction here recorded, was at that time the most celebrated seat of learning, and resorted to for the purposes of education, not only by the inhabitants of Greece, but by most nations of the then known world, that had any taste for the liberal arts and sciences: yet amidst all these boasted acquirements we find the Athenians ignorant of the Deity, and immersed in all the darkness of the grossest superstition. So much were they addicted to idolatry, that the most approved writers of antiquity inform us that Athens was called by way of eminence “the Altar of Greece;” that it had more sacred festivals than any other city, and abounded with images to such a degree, as gave occasion to one of their satirists to say, that at Athens it was easier to find a God than a man.

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It is said that St. Paul was brought to Areopagus or the Hill of Mars, so called from its being dedicated to Mars, whom they feigned to be the god of battle. This was the seat of their senate and supreme court of judicature; but it is evident, from the circumstances of this event, that St. Paul was conducted thither, not as a criminal upon trial, but only as to a place more commodiously situated for the gratification of the public curiosity, that the Athenians, who were lovers of novelty, might hear the whole of his doctrine.

In order more clearly to understand this subject, it may be proper to observe that the inscription on the altar, which the apostle here mentions, was placed there on account of a violent pestilence that had raged among them, about six hundred years before the time of our Lord. We are informed by one of the ancient Greek historians\*, that when this dreadful malady raged at Athens, the few inhabitants who survived it, driven almost to despair on account of the terrible desolation, ignorant what god had inflicted this

\* Diog. Laert. Βίος Επιφανέστες.

scourge,

scourge, and not knowing in what manner to appease his displeasure, repaired to one Epimenides, who, for his exemplary virtue, was styled Theophilestatos, or the beloved of God. With him they consulted what measures they should take to appease the wrath of the offended Deity. He ordered them to take some black and white sheep into the Areopagus, to let them run which ever way they would, to observe whither they went, and then to sacrifice them to that deity near whose temple or altar they should happen to lie down; but as the sheep lay down in a place remote from any of these temples and altars, the Athenians erected an altar inscribed as in the text, "to the "unknown God!" meaning hereby that God, whoever he might be, who had afflicted them with this pestilence. In memory of this event several altars were afterwards erected in public places, and to one of these the apostle here alludes.

✓ To such a degree had the Athenians corrupted and darkened the light of nature, as to have little or no notion of the one true God, as a being possessed of all possible per-



fection both natural and moral. Their wild and depraved imaginations had peopled heaven with a number of deities, whom they represented as beings like themselves, and sometimes as viler than the vilest of men, countenancing by their example every kind of vice. They looked upon them as finite, as careless of the affairs of the world, and as limited in their actions by fate or necessity. Unmindful by whom they were created, or by whom preserved, they seem to have had no apprehension of a Being underived, omnipotent, omnipresent and eternal, endued with unerring wisdom, inviolable justice, unspotted holiness and unbounded mercy. ✓  
 Some of their best philosophers had indeed more just and exalted notions of the being and perfections of the Deity; but these they concealed from the populace, whom they encouraged in the national idolatry.

✓ To instruct them in these important truths was the design with which St. Paul delivered the oration contained in this chapter, a composition truly excellent, whether we consider the sublimity of its language, or the force and propriety of its arguments.

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I beg leave to observe that the expression in the 22d verse, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious," is a very wrong and absurd translation, from which this false conclusion might be deduced, that some degree of superstition was allowable in religion. It should be rendered, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive ye are much addicted to the worship of invisible powers." This reading not only best expresses the sense of the original, but also agrees more with that decorum which St. Paul would be careful to maintain before so polished an assembly.

He begins with assuring them that, though much addicted to what they deemed religion, they were ignorant of one of the most essential and fundamental parts of it, the being and perfections of the true and ever blessed God; as a proof of this, he takes notice of the inscription he had found on one of their ancient altars. He then, with great address, informs them that as they were so desirous of paying devotional honours to unknown deities, he would endeavour to render this inclination conducive to



their greatest advantage, by instructing them in the nature and perfections of one, whom it intimately concerned them to know, and who by his providence was the author of that pestilence that had formerly ravaged their city. He tells them that the God who made, and governed the world with uncontrollable power, dwelt not in temples made with hands; neither is the Lord of heaven and earth worshipped with men's hands; sacrifices contributed not to his support, as they imagined they did to that of their deities: This glorious and all-perfect God could not possibly want any thing at the hands of his creatures, as it is *he* who giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; he, who made all mankind, causing to descend from one common parent all the various nations of the earth, like the several kindred branches of one great family; who, in his eternal wisdom, has assigned to each people their proper habitation, and determined the limits of their increase and prosperity. He assures them that this bountiful and merciful Being, in all the dispensations of his providence, intended to deliver them from  
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that gross darkness in which their degeneracy and prejudices had involved them; and to excite them to seek after *Him*, who, though so little known, was not far from every one of them; these truths he confirmed to them, by a quotation from Aratus, one of their poets, who asserts that we are the offspring of God. Having laid down these important premises, he proceeds, in the 29th verse, to draw proper conclusions from them. “We  
 “being the offspring of God, and bearing  
 “but a faint resemblance of those consum-  
 “mate and original glories that shine forth  
 “in him, ought not to suppose him like any  
 “thing inferior to ourselves, or to imagine  
 “that he can be represented by any thing so  
 “mean as gold, silver or stones, (of which  
 “most of their idols were made) how curi-  
 “ously so ever it might be embellished by  
 “the skill of the statuary.” He adds that mankind had been long deluded with such gross conceptions, but were now called to correct these irregular and hurtful notions, and to entertain more rational and exalted views of religion; for though God had long overlooked the times of this ignorance, had



forborn to punish those, who fell into these corruptions of worship, yet he now publicly and solemnly interposed by the ministry of the Gospel, calling all those to repentance, who should hear its sound. He then represented God as more importunate with men on this head, because it was what would admit of no delay on their part; as he had appointed a day of judgment and retribution for the whole world, in which he would, according to their respective characters, judge and determine the state of all men, by Jesus Christ that illustrious person, whom he had ordained for this purpose, of which he had given sufficient assurance to mankind in raising him from the dead according to his own public prediction; by which he had demonstrated himself able to raise all men from their graves, in order to their appearance before him in judgment.—Thus far the apostle pursued his arguments upon the foundation of natural religion; but when he came to mention the resurrection, we are told, he was interrupted by the rude attack of the philosophers; otherwise it is probable he would have proceeded to lay before them the love  
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of God and Christ, the nature and terms of the gospel, and all the sublime truths and exalted hopes of christianity.

Having thus finished the introductory and explanatory parts of this discourse, I mean to consider some particular respects, in which the Supreme Being may be styled the unknown God. But as this would lead me into a wider field than the limits of the present discourse, I shall defer it till another opportunity, and conclude at present with this one observation which seems naturally to arise from the subject;—That whatever sufficiency may be ascribed to reason, the case now under consideration, is a proof that its light precludes not the necessity of revelation. I readily grant to reason all the excellence she can really claim. I allow her a sphere even as an instructor in religious truth. I allow her to be the judge even of the truth of revelation, because she must determine concerning the evidence upon which revelation is received; but granting all her capacity and powers, as a judge she has seldom rightly decided, except when revelation has furnished her with materials to direct her determination;



mination; and it may be asserted that she is of herself insufficient to guide mankind in general into religious truth. Of this insufficiency mankind seem to have expressed themselves conscious by applying to other directors; hence the prevalence of superstition and idolatry among all those nations on whom the light of revelation hath not shone. Instances of this are afforded not only by the rude uncultivated tribes of savages and barbarians, but even by the polished and refined nations of Greece and Rome. In the elegant and polite city of Athens, when learning and philosophy soared to the greatest height, the bulk of the people were superstitious in their notions, and idolatrous in their practices. Even their philosophers, who entertained more just ideas of God, fell into the popular extravagances, and in their writings we find a strange mixture of sublime truths with puerile absurdities. In one of the dialogues of Plato, which is supposed to contain the last conversation of Socrates with his friends, this philosopher, after expressing the most sublime and rational ideas concerning the existence  
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of a God, and the immortality of the soul, closes the solemn conference by the ridiculous order of a sacrifice to be paid to one of their fabulous deities. The truth is, that whatever religious discoveries men of superior talents may make by the exertion of reason, these can have little influence on the majority, who, as they possess neither ability, leisure, nor inclination for such abstruse inquiries, stand in need of some more easy and immediate instructor.

How thankful then ought we to be, that "the day-spring from on high has visited us;" and that while many parts of the world, like Egypt of old, when afflicted by Moses, are involved in gross darkness, ours is like the land of Goshen, where all was light. One would imagine that the existence of the Deity was one of the most plain and evident truths of natural religion; and yet we see into what gross absurdities the wisest nation of antiquity deviated when unassisted by revelation. But blessed be the divine goodness, the Gospel makes so great a difference between us and them in the knowledge of religion, that even a child  
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among us, if well instructed, has more just and exalted notions of God, than those entertained by some of the most celebrated Pagan philosophers. Genuine Christianity tends to exalt our notions, to enlarge our views of God and divine things, and to place life and immortality before us in the fairest and most attractive point of light ; it holds forth the most glorious prize, and furnishes us with most proper means for its attainment, and thus claims our highest gratitude as a blessing, in which every thing relative to the dignity and happiness of our souls, every thing that is great and good, is most admirably comprized.



## SERMON IX.

*To the unknown God.* ACTS xvii. 23.

**H**AVING in a former discourse explained the connection of these words with the context, and the circumstances to which they refer, I shall now, in a more general manner, consider in what respects the Deity may be styled an unknown God. ✓

He is in some measure unknown to all his creatures. None can by searching find out the Almighty to perfection. To suppose that finite can comprehend infinite, would be as absurd as to think that a part can contain the whole. Whenever we direct our thoughts to him, and meditate upon the incommunicable glories of his nature, we find something that far surpasses the utmost grasp of our conceptions, and overwhelms the largest capacities of the mind. Like mariners without a compass in the midst of the ocean, we are lost in the immensity of the



the scene, and are destitute of every thing whereby to direct our course. But though neither we, nor even the highest angels, can ever fully comprehend the glory and excellence of the Most High, yet it is our duty to meditate upon his perfections, especially those of a moral and communicable nature, and humbly to adore and imitate what we know. Enough is perceived to excite our wonder, reverence and love; enough to engage our obedience and our imitation of a Being thus infinitely excellent. Nature proclaims, reason infers, and revelation asserts, that in him are concentrated consummate holiness, unbiassed justice, inviolable truth, unerring wisdom and unbounded goodness; but how these are blended in his transactions with his creatures is in some measure to us a secret. It is abundantly sufficient that we are sensible by daily experience that these adorable attributes are exerted in our behalf; and with respect to particular properties of the divine nature, it is a point of humility and religion to adore and reverence him as the unknown God. The powers of language fail in attempting  
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to give us even a feeble idea of his excellence. By what strong and sublime imagery doth Scripture labour to afford us a faint glimpse of his infinite power and greatness. By the prophet Isaiah God is represented as "measuring the waters in the hollow of his hand, as meeting out the heavens with a span, as weighing the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance, as sitting upon the circle of the earth, the inhabitants of which are but as grasshoppers before him." —Such representations as these are intended to fill us with the most sublime apprehensions of the ever-blessed God; and while they exalt our conception of *him*, ought to repress those extravagant notions of worth, dignity and importance, which we are apt to form of ourselves. What is man? What are even angels? Nay, what are the excellencies of both, or even of the whole range of created beings combined, when compared with those of the all-perfect Jehovah, to which they bear infinitely less proportion than a drop of water to the ocean? Nor is God unknown to us only while on earth, but will remain so when we are exalted to a  
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state of immortality. Though his perfections will be the delightful subject of our inquiries throughout eternity; yet, after all, we shall be acquainted with but a small portion when compared with the whole. Even in heaven, it will be but in part that he will be known to us, though this part will be sufficient to render us as happy as our limited nature will admit. After millions of ages shall have been spent in gratifying our eager desire of knowing him completely, yet new wonders will remain to be explored. His perfections are inexhaustible as eternity is endless.—Great infinite Unknown!—Wilt thou stoop from the throne of universal empire to hold converse with sinful dust and ashes? Wilt thou condescend to lay aside the awful glories of thy majesty, and to assume the title of our Father—our Friend—our Saviour?—Yes, it is under these amiable relations that God manifests himself to us; under these engaging characters he surrounds us with the bounties of his providence, in the various blessings of life; and has made rich provision for our improvement, comfort and happiness in the constitution

tution of the Gospel. How then ought we to be affected by such unspeakable goodness? To devote ourselves to his service, to love, to honour, to obey him, is the least we can do: yet this is all that he demands.—Let us then do it with all our might; let nothing rival affections so justly due; let nothing interfere with duties so essentially necessary.

There are many nations of the earth to whom God is entirely unknown. Though all the works of nature so plainly declare him, yet a great part of the world knows him not, but in the midst of light wanders in the grossest darkness. ✓ It appears, upon the most accurate computations, that if the habitable earth were divided into thirty-two parts, nineteen of them are Pagan, eight embrace the delusions of Mahomet, and the remaining five are Christian. ✓ Where Paganism reigns, the conceptions of God are so monstrous, that men may justly be said to be ignorant of him. Idols are the objects of their worship, and to the invisible power whom they suppose to dwell in them they endeavour to recommend themselves by vows of painful abstinence, by expensive oblations, and some-



times by human sacrifices, making the most execrable cruelty a part of their pretended piety. This is particularly the case in some parts of the East Indies to this day; where many of the votaries to their idols, who are ambitious of an extraordinary reputation for sanctity, pass their lives in various and exquisite misery, not only subduing, but even destroying their natural appetites, and maintaining a perpetual war against the most innocent sensations of nature, in the hope of obtaining the favour of their imaginary deities. The Mahometans indeed acknowledge the existence of a God, and have some just notions of him; but these are blended with so many fables, and confounded with such a number of absurd conceptions, (borrowed from the Jewish cabala,) as well as spun from the inventive brain of their founder,) that it is difficult to separate truth from fiction; and their knowledge exceeds Pagan ignorance no further than the dim twilight does profound darkness.

But is it not a melancholy truth, that God is unknown to many on whom the Sun of Righteousness has arisen, and on whom the day-

day-light of the Gospel fully shines. He may justly be said to be unknown to all wicked men who profess Christianity; for though they acknowledge his being and perfections, and would be offended if called Atheists, yet if they manifest not their reverence and love, by walking humbly before him, they are in fact guilty of the worst and most aggravated kind of Atheism. What avails their speculative knowledge of the ever-blessed God, while "in works they deny him, being foolish, disobedient, and "to every good work reprobate? What signifies their having the knowledge of Christians, while in their temper and practice they are worse than heathens? In this case their superior light only tends to aggravate their crimes and inflame their guilt. In a Christian land the means of religious knowledge are neither scanty nor difficult of access, and, amidst these advantages, ignorance of God is inexcusable, and dreadful in its consequences.

Are there not too many, who, blest with the greatest opportunities of improving in the practical knowledge of God, yet suffer



these opportunities to escape unimproved? who are but too apt to permit the religious impressions made upon them to be erased? How many are there who, though they have deliberately and solemnly determined to have none but him in heaven, and none upon earth that they desire in comparison with him; yet, too easily yielding to the temptations that surround them, forget their solemn choice, or at least lose that deep sense of its importance and excellence which ought to be cherished and maintained with the utmost care and attention. The best of Christians arrive not at that pitch of excellence which they might attain in the use and improvement of the means God has given them. Their faith, their love, their hope often languishes; the crowd of temporal objects flitting before them diminishes their sense of piety and virtue, contracts their views, and abates their diligence. Take heed, therefore, Christians, that while you think you stand securely you fall not, through neglect and presumption! Remember the advice of your Lord to be constantly watchful; advice which he was too wise and kind

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to have given, if he had not known it to be absolutely necessary. Take heed of indulging to any known sin, for you are not aware how far it may lead you beyond what you intend. If you have failed, stop short, and, in dependence on divine mercy, endeavour to return as soon as possible to the path you have left; for be assured that the further you wander from it the less likely you will be to return, and the danger of your never returning will increase every day. One act of vice naturally leads to another; the longer it is indulged the deeper it takes root, till it grows into a confirmed habit and cannot be eradicated without infinite pains; sin rapidly increases in its progress, and that moral cloud which at first was no bigger than a man's hand, soon extends itself over the atmosphere, and spreads the destructive tempest far and wide. Wickedness grows stronger as those who indulge it advance in years, as a river grows broader and deeper the nearer it approaches the sea: when but a small rivulet near the fountain head, its course might easily have been stopped and altered; but, when it has thus flowed on,



increased by numberless streams, it baffles all opposition, and unrestrained rolls on its mighty waters to the deep. Let these considerations excite you to be ever watchful and diligent, to guard against the least approach to sin, the least indifference to religion. Labour to obtain a more practical knowledge of God, and to acquire that deep and constant sense of your obligations to perform his will, which must be the Christian's best foundation for virtue here, and for happiness hereafter.

While we endeavour to increase the knowledge of God in ourselves, let us also labour to cultivate it in others. And here suffer me particularly to address myself to those who are parents, and exhort you to neglect no opportunity of infusing religious knowledge into the minds of your children. Much more of the happiness of life depends upon the management of its early years than people generally imagine, for as the seal, whether good or bad, makes a strong impression upon the warm and pliant wax, so instructions and examples, of whatever kind, are most easily insinuated and fixed in the beginning

ginning of life. Though we cannot say that it will be infallibly attended with success, because we have too many instances of those becoming reprobate who have enjoyed the clearest instructions and the best examples, yet it is certainly the most likely method to form the mind to a love of piety and virtue. Success may reasonably be hoped if we do our duty, whereas in the neglect of it we can expect nothing but the ruin of our children and dependents. If we could compare the number of those who have fallen into vicious courses after a religious education, with that of those who for want of it have been undone, the former would bear a small proportion to the latter. May it not be hoped that good principles, early impressed upon the heart, even though suffered for a time to rust in neglect, or to be partly obliterated by ill conduct, may in some cooler moment resume their force, and promote a return to virtue. A religious education is profitable to those who are thus instructed, even in a temporal view, as it is likely to form them to a regular deport-



ment ; much more is it advantageous, when successful, to their infinitely higher interest. It is also highly pleasing to God, who has left this honourable testimony concerning Abraham, " I know him that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment."

Let those then, who while they live amidst the light of the Gospel improve not in the practical knowledge of God and religion, seriously reflect on their fatal condition. Even under the imperfect Jewish dispensation God declared that he desired mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of himself more than burnt-offering. We may be assured that the mercy of God will make suitable allowances for those who never had opportunities of being acquainted with him, and who labour under inevitable ignorance ; but it will be more tolerable for the most blind of the heathen world in the day of judgment, than for those who remain ignorant of him under the advantages of the Gospel dispensation. It is from his holy word that

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we are to learn this divine science, and while we attend to it, we should pray that he would enlighten our minds, that we may be better acquainted with him, and with Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, whom thus to know is no less than life eternal.





to be in the same way as the  
we cannot do it. We should pray that we  
would be able to do it. That we may be  
better acquainted with the Lord and with His  
will. Who is the Lord? Who is the Lord?  
Know as no one else the Lord.



## S E R M O N X.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.—This is the first and great commandment. ST. MATTHEW xxii. 37, 38.*

**T**HERE cannot be a more evident proof of the consummate excellence of the religion of Jesus, than the answer which he here gives to a scribe, who had asked him what was the great commandment of the Law. Nothing can place the Gospel in a more amiable point of view, or inspire us with a greater esteem for it, than this declaration of its founder, that its first and great command is love : nor can any thing be better adapted to operate on our hearts, and excite our affections, than the consideration that God, the greatest and the best of beings, God whom we so often offend, and whose power we have so much reason to fear, condescends to require that we should  
love



love him; requires it for our own sakes, to promote our virtue and happiness. For if we obey this grand injunction, if we fix our affections upon an object thus excellent, the practice of every duty of the christian life will become easy and delightful, and we shall feel that the divine commandments are not grievous. Nothing therefore can be of greater importance to us than to cultivate love to God: and for this purpose it is necessary that we each of us examine our hearts to discern how far we have obeyed the precept, and how far we are deficient in it. How ought we to be grieved, if, upon such an examination, we should find that we are strangers to the rational and religious sentiments required in this precept, or that we have not cultivated them so much as our duty and happiness demand! If we neglect this, of how many delightful hours, of how much serene enjoyment do we deprive ourselves! If we love not God as we ought, we can neither expect strength to resist temptation, nor consolation and hope to support us in the seasons of affliction and death. It is therefore of the utmost importance

tance that we examine whether the love of God be in us: and for this purpose, I shall endeavour to lay before you the nature of the duty, and our obligations to cultivate the sentiments it requires.

To love God is to consider him as our supreme good, as the source of all our happiness, to find more satisfaction in him than in any other object; to value and desire his favour and friendship beyond the greatest temporal advantages, and to be diligent and fervent in endeavouring to secure his approbation.

The love which we owe to God is the same in kind, though in degree it should be superior to that which we bear to our relations and friends. In both cases, our affection, in order to be sincere and lasting, must be founded on esteem, on lively impressions of the respectable and amiable attributes we discover in the object of our complacency. In both cases, our affection will shew itself by producing similar effects, exciting similar sentiments, and causing similar actions and habits. It is however necessary to observe that love to God is not a passion, vehement



hement and transitory, but a rational sentiment and affection, a permanent and habitual principle of conduct. We must therefore be careful that we fall not into the error of many well-meaning, though weak, persons who have disgraced religion in general, and this duty in particular, by expressions which, to say the least of them, are absurd and enthusiastic, and betray an extravagant imagination with very little judgment.

These things being premised, it will be easy to discern whether we really love God by pointing out the temper and conduct, which an observance of the precept naturally tends to produce.

Frequently to think on God is one sign by which the pious christian discerns that he loves him. How often, and with what pleasure, do we think on those friends whom we tenderly love! Their idea is deeply impressed in our minds, and on every occasion rises to our recollection. The most trivial circumstance of resemblance, the most accidental coincidence is sufficient to remind us of all their amiable qualities. These ideas  
often

often come unbidden and offer themselves amidst our most serious employments: but when ever they occur they are received with pleasure, and we delight to dwell upon and indulge them. Thus the pious christian frequently thinks with the utmost satisfaction on the Supreme Being. These thoughts become so habitual that they are ever at hand, arise in his mind on every occasion, and occur amidst all his employments and satisfactions, amidst all his joys and all his sufferings. They are so delightful to him that he considers them as the life of his soul, carefully cherishes them, and fixes his meditations upon them as long as the duties of active life will permit. Wherever he turns his view, he finds splendid traces of the wisdom, power and goodness of his Creator. Every scene of this material world leads him to contemplate the glory of its first great Cause. To him all nature seems to celebrate its mighty contriver, and to declare that "great is the Lord and greatly to be  
 "praised, that he is good unto all, and that  
 "his tender mercies are over all his works."  
 In every event that takes place, he discerns  
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the directing hand of the great Governor of the universe, and adores that all-wise Providence, without which nothing can come to pass. Whatever may be his circumstances, they lead him to contemplate God as the Being on whom he absolutely depends. Are his endeavours crowned with success? Is he blessed with peace, satisfaction and comfort? His heart pours forth its grateful effusions to God, as the source of all his advantages, to whose paternal blessing he ascribes all that he enjoys. Are his undertakings frustrated, and his prospects darkened with adversity? Still he trusts in God, and leaves the disposal of all his concerns to him, from whom he humbly hopes support and consolation. Thus he lives as in the presence of the Almighty; and every thing that he sees or hears, every thing that concerns either himself or others, administers occasion and encouragement to meditate on the perfections of the Deity, and to raise his soul, in silent contemplation, to the moral excellence that commands his affections.

Those who truly love God will take pleasure in the exercises of devotion, whether  
private

private or public. What satisfaction do we derive from conversation with friends who are dear to us, and how much do we long for their presence when we have been any time deprived of it! How lively and affecting are our sensations of pleasure when we can lay open our whole heart before them, when we can without reserve expose to their view all our most secret thoughts and designs! And will not communion with God be equally grateful to those who love him? With this exalted Being, as he cannot be the object of our senses, we can converse no otherwise than by making him the object of our meditations, by reading or hearing his word, by praying to him in private and in public, and offering the tribute of praise and thanksgiving which is so justly due to him, as supremely excellent and inexhaustibly good. The man who truly loves God will engage in these employments not merely without reluctance, but with the utmost eagerness and delight; and will deem himself never so truly happy as when he can thus draw near to God, and hold communion with him. What serene complacency

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flows in upon his soul, when he surveys the wise and benevolent works and ways of the Almighty; when he considers the consolatory relations in which he stands towards his Creator and Father, his Benefactor and Redeemer; when he recollects the many proofs of his loving kindness and tender mercy which he has already received, and contemplates those more glorious manifestations of his bounty for which he is encouraged to hope in the future stages of his existence; when, with a heart overflowing with wonder and gratitude, he prostrates himself before his God, and worships him who liveth for ever and ever. What sacred joy beams in on his mind, when with filial confidence he can approach the throne of grace, pour out his whole heart before God, cast all his cares upon him, trust in his mercy, and from the all-sufficient source of good derive new strength for the performance of duty, and new fortitude to support him under every affliction. Hence he cheerfully embraces every opportunity of joining his fellow-christians in the solemnities of God's house, of "entering into his gates with thanksgiving,

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"ing, and into his courts with praise." Religious instruction he receives with humility and a sincere desire to improve by it, and esteems the study of the divine word as the means by which he becomes acquainted with the will of his Lord and master, and with the designs and purposes of his merciful Father and all beneficent Friend.

A prudent and active zeal for the honour of God, is another mark by which our love to him is manifested. We cannot with indifference hear our friends calumniated, their reputation destroyed by false accusations, or the lustre of their characters diminished by misrepresenting the nature of their virtues: nor can we without pleasure hear justice done to their character, esteem expressed for their persons, or their actions celebrated with the praise they deserve. In either case we are deeply interested in whatever concerns them: if envy or malice falsely accuse them, how readily do we stand forth to defend or justify their conduct! and how affectionately do we think of those who speak of our friends with approbation and respect! And can he who loves God sincerely avoid



similar feelings? Can he sit by with indifference, and hear the ways and works of the Most High arrogantly censured, his name blasphemed, and his word made the subject of contemptuous ridicule? Must he not be deeply concerned when he sees men pursuing their evil inclinations, alienating themselves from God, and obstinately refusing the homage due to him? What can afford him more pleasure than to hear that the sinner repents, that the backslider is recovered, and that true religion and virtue extend their influence over the world? How diligent is he to promote by every good word and work the kingdom of heaven upon earth; and how happy when, by the divine blessing, his labours are not entirely unsuccessful.

A sincere love of God will manifest itself by a constant and fervent endeavour to render ourselves acceptable to him, by a cheerful and universal obedience to his commandments. This is the most necessary and essential effect of this duty, and is indeed inseparable from sincere affection. How careful are we that we do not by our conduct offend  
a friend

a friend for whom we have a sincere regard ! Of what importance do we think it to obtain his approbation, to inspire him with a good opinion, or to strengthen that which he may already have conceived of us ; and how easy do we find it to do that which we know will give him satisfaction, and increase his esteem for us ! And can we imagine that we truly love God, when we presumptuously neglect his commandments, and wilfully violate his injunctions ? Do we know that truth and moral order are his supreme delight ; that rectitude and virtue are the objects of his greatest complacency ; and that the practice of these is the only means of obtaining his favour ? “ Ye that love the Lord, “ see that ye hate the thing that is evil ; for “ this is the love of God that we keep his “ commandments.” Those who love God in sincerity will obey him with cheerfulness and pleasure. As nothing is to them more desirable than to be acceptable in his sight, and as they know this is impossible unless they are conformed to his image, they consider diligence in virtue and holiness as of the utmost importance. In their moral con-



slict with the various temptations which might seduce them into vice, they are influenced not by temporal views, not by the perverse principles and customs of the world, but by the good and perfect will of their God. This is the rule of their whole conduct. Whatever is contrary to this they shun with aversion and abhorrence: whatever this recommends they pursue, they love, they practise, whatever labour, difficulty, or self-denial it may cost them. To offend their heavenly Father, and to lose his friendship, is what they fear much more than to incur the hatred and enmity of the mightiest among men; and think it of infinitely greater importance to be acceptable to the Most High, than to obtain the esteem and approbation of the whole world.

A sincere and active love to our brethren of mankind is another effect by which love to God is manifested. We are never more happy than when we can promote the happiness of those whom we sincerely love. If they need not our assistance, or are beyond the reach of our good offices, we take a pleasure in doing good to those who belong

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to them, who are connected with them, who are esteemed and beloved by them. Those whom they recommend to our notice will never be disregarded; and the least hint from them is sufficient to excite our zeal, and make us co-operate in their designs. Apply this reasoning to the pious Christian, and you will discern new lines of his character, new effects of his love to the supreme Being. God is infinitely removed from all want and imperfection: he is immutable in his nature, and dwells in compleat felicity. We can neither increase his perfections, nor add to his enjoyments. But he has rational creatures who bear his image; he has those whom he deems his children, friends and servants upon earth, to whom, in various ways, we may be useful, whose temporal and eternal felicity we may promote. These he recommends to our love, to our protection, to our assistance. To these, then, we ought to render those benevolent offices which we cannot render to the all-sufficient Friend who recommends them. Nay, he has assured us that he will regard the acts of kindness which we perform to them, as if we had



performed them to himself. And shall these recommendations make no impression upon our hearts? Can we neglect them without forfeiting all pretence to the love of God? Remember the words of the apostle; "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God, love his brother also. But whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his heart from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

The Christian who loves God with all his heart, soul and mind, will manifest the sincerity of his affection, by longing after that state of existence, in which he shall be more immediately connected with the Deity, and enjoy a greater portion of his favour. What can be more natural than to be concerned at the absence of the friends we esteem, and to wish for their continual presence? What circumstances can be more painful than to be separated from them, and to be prevented

ed by the occupations and pursuits of life, from being with them so often as we would wish? Such also are the sentiments of the pious Christian. Though he is well assured that God is not far from any one of us; though the throne of mercy is ever accessible to him; though, even in this life, he holds communion with God and Christ, yet his knowledge is obscure, his virtue imperfect, and his happiness interrupted. The connections which attach him to the world often prevent him from drawing nigh to God, and fixing his meditations on heavenly things. When he reflects on the divine excellence, and how much his attachment to the Deity is impeded by the infirmities, both natural and moral, of his present condition, his wishes and hopes rise above every sublunary object. He longs to arrive at the mansion of his heavenly Father, where his Saviour has prepared a place for him, where he shall cultivate a most compleat knowledge of the greatest and best of beings, entertain clearer ideas of his exalted perfections, and have brighter views of the wisdom and goodness of his ways and works; where sin shall

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no more alienate him from his God, and where he shall be able to serve his Maker without interruption and without weariness.

Such are the effects by which a sincere love to God will naturally manifest itself; and if we do not in some degree experience these in ourselves, there is much reason to fear we do not cultivate that regard to the greatest and best of benefactors which we should think due, and naturally be inclined to pay, to those earthly friends whom we esteem and love. On this account the very best of us have much reason to be humbled for our negligence and inattention. And are there not many, who from levity and inconsideration seldom bestow a thought upon their obligations to the God that made them what they are, and gave them whatever they enjoy; on whose protecting hand they depend for life and all its blessings, and on whose mercy they must rely for all their hopes of happiness hereafter? But let such, and let us all, reflect that without love to God there can be no religion, nor any steady and uniform principle of virtue. It is only in proportion as we cultivate love to  
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God, that we can serve him acceptably here, or become qualified for happiness hereafter.

—This indifference and want of regard to God, arises, in general, not so much from any malignity of disposition, as from a forgetfulness, which is occasioned by too great an attachment to the pursuits of the world.

Hence let us be concerned to moderate our love of the things of time and sense; and by devout meditation, and all the duties of religious worship, to cultivate that love of moral excellence, and those grateful affections to God, as the author and source of all good, which consist, not in the glowing ardours of human sensibility, but in rational sentiments, founded in conviction, and productive of virtue. That we may not want encouragement to this, let us ever remember the Deity has expressly assured us “that he loves them that love him, and that they who seek him early shall find him.”

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God, that we can love him acceptably here, or become qualified for his kingdom hereafter. — His indifference and want of regard to God, which in general, has so much of an arbitrary or discretionary as from a sort of selfishness, which is occasioned by too great an attachment to the pursuits of the world. Hence let us be contented to moderate our love of the things of time and sense, and by devotion to him, and all the duties of religious worship, to cultivate that love of moral excellence, and those grateful affections to God, as the author and source of all good, which consist, not in the glowing ardours of human sensibility, but in rational sentiments, founded in conviction, and productive of virtue. That we may not want encouragement to this let us ever remember the Society has expressly assured us "that he loves them that love him; and that they who love him only shall find him." —

## S E R M O N XI.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.—This is the first and great commandment.* ST. MATTHEW xxii. 37, 38.

**I**N a former discourse on these words we endeavoured to explain the nature of the duty which our blessed Lord here enjoins, by pointing out some effects which love to God will unavoidably produce in the temper of its votaries, and by which it is manifested. We shall now proceed to explain more particularly what is implied in loving him “with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind.” These expressions, which seem to be repetitions of the same idea, indicate the sincerity and fervour of those regards which are due to the Almighty. They imply an unfeigned, an ardent, an active and permanent affection, an affection which subdues the whole soul  
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under its influence, which actuates all its faculties and powers, and becomes an habitual and prevalent sentiment. In this however God requires nothing of us that is impossible, nothing that is unreasonable, nothing that ought to be difficult. In explaining this as well as many others of the divine precepts, some good persons have represented the injunction as so exceedingly strict and severe, that it is next to impossible it should be complied with by beings circumstanced as we are. By this they have discouraged many well-meaning christians in the performance of their duty, and deterred others from entering upon a religious course of life, and led them to reject it as an unreasonable service. It would for instance be highly unreasonable and inconsistent with the nature and circumstances of man, to require that he should entirely confine all his attention to the supreme Being, be incessantly employed in contemplating his perfections, and thus neglect every other pursuit and business of life. It would also be unreasonable and inconsistent with the nature and condition of man, to exact as a duty, that he should  
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never wish for, or desire any thing except communion with God, that he should love him exclusive of every thing else, and be indifferent and insensible to all other objects, however beautiful, good or useful, they may be. But nothing thus unreasonable is required of us by our wise and beneficent Creator, when he commands us to "love him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind." Such requisition would not only be beyond our power to comply with, but also palpably inconsistent with the designs of God concerning us. The constitution of our nature, and all the circumstances of our existence, are established and appointed by him. With these nothing can be more consistent, than that we should love ourselves, that we should, in a certain degree, esteem and desire whatever may promote our welfare, that we should take pleasure in enjoying the advantages, comforts and innocent recreations of life, that we should behold with satisfaction and delight the beauty and excellence of the divine works around us.—God himself has expressly commanded us to love our  
neigh-



neighbour; and what can be more agreeable to his will, than that order, truth, virtue and moral good should be the objects of our esteem and love wherever we may find them?

Permit me then to observe that the precept of the text implies that our love to God be sincere and unfeigned. It ought to be founded in a just conception and lively conviction of the venerable and amiable attributes of the Most High. The words and actions by which we express and manifest our regard, must be strictly conformable to the sentiments and inclinations of our hearts. Without this agreement all that we may say or do to convince the world of our love to God is nothing but hypocrisy, and cannot but be highly displeasing to that almighty Being who seeth in secret, and searcheth the heart. Without this agreement between the sentiments of the heart and the external conduct, there can be no such thing as true affection. In what light do we consider those expressions of esteem and love, by which the heart is unaffected, which leave it cold and insensible, and consist merely in professions of respect, in smooth words,  
flat-

flattering expressions, and unmeaning ceremonies? Should we not consider the person, whose heart and conduct were thus at variance, as a most contemptible and unworthy character. And shall we not deem such hypocrisy at once foolish and criminal, when practised towards the supreme Being, who discerns our hearts and justly claims our affections? God is a spirit, and we must therefore worship, reverence and love him in spirit and in truth.

The text also requires that we love God supremely, or beyond any other object. Nothing ought to be so valuable or desirable in our estimation as the approbation and favour of the Almighty. To obtain and to preserve these should be deemed of infinitely greater importance than any thing the world can offer. These ought to be the grand object of all our desires, of all our endeavours, of all our actions. When they would tempt us to lose sight of this exalted aim, the greatest worldly advantages, the most exquisite pleasures of sense should be considered as worthless and contemptible, and we should reject them without hesitation when-



ever they would alienate us from God. No difficulties, no losses, no obstacles must deter us from the path which leads to this goal, or render our steps in it faint and weary. The will of God ought to make a deeper impression on our hearts than all the good the world can promise, and than all the evil it can threaten; and in every instance, even in the most dangerous and alarming circumstances, we must resolutely obey him rather than the most powerful and formidable among mankind. We should not deem any thing too valuable to be cheerfully sacrificed at the shrine of God and virtue, whenever these may demand it at our hands. We must be ready to abandon and resign even those objects which are most dear to us upon earth, whenever we cannot retain them without incurring the displeasure of the supreme Being, or endangering the loss of his favour. This is what our blessed Lord means when he says, "He that loveth  
 "father or mother more than me, is not  
 "worthy of me: he that loveth son or  
 "daughter more than me, is not worthy of  
 "me; and whosoever he be that forsaketh  
 "not

“not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

Further, If we would love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, our regard to all those objects which deserve our esteem and engage our affections, must have an ultimate reference and relation to God, as the author of their existence and the source whence they are derived. We may lawfully indulge a certain degree of esteem and desire for temporal blessings and advantages, and may freely enjoy them within those limits of moderation which the Deity has prescribed, and which our true happiness requires. We may take delight in whatever nature affords of beautiful or useful; and we may open our hearts to the innocent pleasure with which they are inspired on surveying the beauties, or enjoying the benefits, which Providence with liberal hand has diffused around us. But all these we must consider as the favours of the Most High, as instances of his love, which ought to excite our humble and grateful affections to the bounteous Giver. Never must we confine our affections to the crea-



ture, but always raise them to that Being, whose goodness and mercy are proclaimed by all his works. Whatever blessings he confers upon us, we must use and enjoy in a manner conformable to his holy will, and so order our whole conduct "that men seeing our good works," may be edified by our good example, and excited "to glorify their father who is in heaven." Thus the love we bear to ourselves and to our fellow-creatures, and the enjoyment we derive from temporal advantages, instead of diminishing, will augment our love to God, and every advantage we enjoy, will become an additional excitement to quicken and increase our grateful regard to its bountiful Author.

Lastly, the text requires that our love to God be constant and unchangeable. It must be the ruling inclination of our hearts, must be manifested at all times and on all occasions, and must influence the whole of our conduct. In vain does he pretend to love God with all his heart, and soul and mind, who hesitates between God and the world; who one day pursues the former and the next the latter as his supreme good; who

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one day follows the dictates of the divine will, and the next is the grovelling slave of his corrupt passions and inclinations. In vain does he boast of his regard to the Deity who loves him only during his prosperity, when all his enterprizes are crowned with success; but whose zeal and piety are slackened as soon as he is visited with affliction; and who is ready to murmur against God whenever he thinks fit to set bounds to his liberality, and to require those stronger proofs of love which consist in resignation and obedience. The love which the pious Christian bears to God is widely different from this. It cannot indeed at all times be equally fervent and active; its lustre is sometimes dimmed by human frailties and imperfections, but it always preserves its influence in his heart. He thinks as respectfully and gratefully of God, when he bestows paternal chastisement, as when he dispenses the blessings of prosperity. In both cases he rejoices in being under the divine protection and providence, and the lively hope of a future state of happiness preserves its fervour in every circumstance of life.



Such is the manner in which we must love God, if we would obey the precept of our blessed Lord, which he has styled "the first and great commandment." With what propriety this appellation was given to it will appear if we consider the reasons upon which our obligations to love God are founded. These will furnish matter for a future inquiry, and I shall close this discourse with the following reflections.

How gratefully ought we to admire the condescension of God, that he has commanded us to love him, and will accept of those affections which even in their best state are so very defective. It is an invaluable honour conferred upon us, and ought to be a subject of our praise, that he who is perfectly glorious and needs nothing from any, even of the most exalted of his creatures, should so far consult our happiness as to make it our duty to love him. He has here inseparably connected the noblest reward with the most honourable duty that can be enjoined upon us; for in proportion as we are under the influence of this divine principle will our happiness be promoted, both in this and in a future world. Let

Let us seriously reflect that if we do not cultivate love to God while here, we cannot be duly prepared for the happiness of heaven hereafter. Let us therefore labour to acquire it, while life remains, while the means of grace are in our hands. May the sinner's heart be charmed with the long-suffering, the bounty and mercy of the Almighty, who invites him to be at peace with him and with his own conscience; "who is not willing that any should perish;" who daily and hourly repeats his friendly overtures, and calls upon him to love his own soul by loving him.

Let those also who are so happy as to be in any degree possessed of this divine temper be diligent to improve in it. Were we careful and industrious in this respect, how amiable would be the aspect of religion to us, with what fervour should we engage in every part of it, and how attractive would it appear in our example to the world around us. Reading the Scriptures, especially the New Testament and the devotional parts of the Old, joined with serious and devout meditation and fervent prayer, are the best



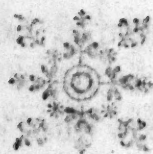
means that can be used to promote this and every other religious principle. By diligently persevering in these, in humble dependence on the divine blessing, we may hope to have our hearts directed into the love of God; and to improve in this heavenly disposition is the best and most certain way to increase our own satisfaction and comfort. "Love the Lord therefore all ye his saints!" Be concerned to have a deeper sense of his infinitely amiable and venerable perfections, a more lively faith in his promises, and a stronger determination of will to his service. Consider him as the inexhaustible source of light, of good, of happiness; as acting in the joint characters of friend and governor, imparting an endless variety of blessings to his rational offspring, and supplying them with every thing necessary to the full completion of their happiness. By the divine blessing on such considerations may our minds be more open to the perception of truth, and habitually disposed to love and adore him, to trust and rejoice in him who is great and amiable beyond all comparison, beyond all comprehension;

hension; in whom perfect power, wisdom and good essentially dwell, and perpetually act in the most consummate harmony. To contemplate the Deity in these views, and to cultivate these dispositions towards him will be the best employment of your noblest powers, will render you increasingly virtuous and happy through all the rising gradations of an endless duration.





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## S E R M O N XII.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.—This is the first and great commandment. ST. MATTHEW xxii. 37, 38.*

**N**OTHING is more detrimental to the interests of true religion, than to substitute the ceremonial for the moral part, and to represent doctrines as of greater importance than duties. In the former of these respects was the religion of Moses corrupted by the Jewish teachers, especially about the time of our Saviour's appearance: some of them laid so great a stress upon sacrifices, as to esteem the ceremonies of the Altar, the first and great commandment. Hence we find, in the parallel passage to our text, as related by St. Mark, that our blessed Lord commended the scribe for observing, "that  
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"love our neighbour as ourselves, was more  
 "than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifici-  
 "ces." These indeed have long since been  
 totally abolished, so that we are in no dan-  
 ger of preferring them to the law of love.  
 Yet there are, even in these days, but too  
 many who may be said to prefer sacrifice to  
 mercy, who lay more stress upon the exter-  
 nal forms of religion, than upon the moral  
 and social virtues. Equally do those devi-  
 ate from the genuine spirit of the Gospel,  
 who make it to consist in a particular set of  
 notions, in maintaining which, they are so  
 uncharitably zealous, that they pronounce  
 little less than damnation on those who dif-  
 fer from them, though it be in things, con-  
 cerning which the greatest, wisest, and best  
 men that ever appeared in the christian  
 church, have been divided in their opinions.  
 Intolerance is the worst error of the Romish  
 Church; and how much is it to be lamented  
 that it has gained access among Protestants  
 of almost every denomination!—But how  
 inconsistent is this with the true principles  
 of the Reformation, and what is of more  
 importance, how opposed to the example  
 of

of our Saviour, and the genuine spirit of his religion ! Important as the doctrines he revealed were in themselves, he always represents them as useful to us, only as we make them the principles of a pious and benevolent conduct. When questioned concerning that which constituted the most essential parts of religion, he declared, to the no small mortification of the ceremonial Pharisee, that “ it consisted in loving God “ with all our heart and soul and mind, and “ our neighbour as ourselves.” On these two commandments, he observes, hang all “ the law and the prophets.”

In my two former discourses upon these words I have endeavoured to explain the duty here inculcated by shewing how love to God will naturally manifest itself in the temper and conduct, and by pointing out what is implied in loving him “ with all our heart, “ soul and mind.” It now remains that I shew the propriety of styling it the first and great commandment. This will appear if we consider the reasons and obligations upon which the duty is established.

Love and esteem are founded upon the excel-



excellence of the objects themselves, upon the ties by which we are related to them, upon the benefits we have already received, and the advantages we hope to derive from them. To the love of God we are obliged by the united force of all these reasons, as well as by a concern for our own improvement and happiness, which depend entirely upon our cultivating this temper.

What Being can be more excellent, more venerable, more amiable than God? Whatever is good and perfect is essential to him, and united in him. Every instance of beauty and perfection, whatever can afford us pleasure or excite our admiration in this world, is originally derived from him the universal source of all excellence, whether natural or moral. How mean is the dignity of the noblest, and how vain the good qualities of the best among mortals, when compared with the excellence and attributes of the Most High! He possesses in the highest degree whatever can deserve admiration and affection. Does an extensive yet beneficent power command esteem and reverence? God is omnipotent; his power is infinite in degree

gree, and unbounded in the wide range of its exertion: "He spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast." His "kingdom ruleth over all, and his dominion is from generation to generation." Nor is it possible that he should ever abuse his extensive and absolute authority, for "righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne." His power is always exerted in strict conformity to the laws of justice and equity, for the protection and defence of the pious and good, for the preservation of order and harmony, and is dreadful only to the obstinately and presumptuously wicked. Do knowledge and wisdom engage our esteem and command our veneration? God is supremely wise: "He is great in counsel as well as mighty in work." Heaven and Earth witness this. All his creatures, whether animate or inanimate, the admirable organization of our bodies, and the rational faculties of our souls, all, all conspire to manifest the knowledge and wisdom of their almighty Creator. And what are all the several rays of knowledge; wisdom and genius, which we behold shining in



in various degrees among mankind? What are these but emanations from him, the Father of spirits, the pure and eternal source of light and life? Do you consider virtue, sanctity and moral rectitude as the worthiest objects of your esteem and love? In God they are all united: "He is light, and in him is no darkness. He is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Mercy and truth own him for their perfect parent. "Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Before the unsullied splendours of his sanctity, the most exalted angels hide their faces, while prostrated in humble adoration, they cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory."—Are we charmed with goodness and mercy, with generous and benevolent sentiments and actions? Do these steal upon our hearts, and with gentle yet irresistible force command our reverential affection?—God is love itself: "He is gracious and merciful, long-suffering and of great kindness, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin." From his throne  
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the fullest rivers of life, of joy, of happiness, incessantly flow to his creatures, and his benevolence is without bounds, immeasurably great! And does not a Being endued with such attributes with such perfections, deserve our highest esteem, our deepest veneration, our supreme affection? Must we not be insensible to every thing that is beautiful and good, excellent and amiable, if we do not cultivate love to God in whom all this is united in the highest possible degree of perfection?

Consider also the several relations in which we stand to the Deity, as well as the number and the value of the benefits he has bestowed upon us. He is our Creator, and we are the work of his hands; he is our Lord and we are his subjects and servants; he is our Father and we are his children. Can we be bound by stronger ties than these? Can there be a more equitable, or a stronger claim to all the best affections of our hearts, than that which is derived to God from these natural and indissoluble relations? Is he not the kindest and mildest of masters, the tenderest and most affectionate of fathers? Is it not to him that we are indebted for life

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and breath, for the capacities, faculties and advantages which ennoble our nature, and render us superior to the brute creation? Is it not he who continually supports and abundantly provides for us; from whom every good and every perfect gift proceedeth, who daily openeth his hand, and satisfieth every living creature with his goodness? To him we owe every thing that can contribute to render our abode in the world comfortable and delightful. He it was who gave to the heavens their magnificence, to the sun his light, to the earth her fertility, to plants their beauty and usefulness, to animals their capacity to be serviceable to us, and to man his inventive genius and industry. How often does he pardon when he might justly punish us! With what astonishing patience does he bear with our infirmities and sins, and with what forbearance does he prolong the season of repentance and reformation! How often has he favoured us with the most striking displays of his protecting providence in times of danger, of his assistance in seasons of difficulty, of his support and comfort in hours of infirmity

mity and distress! But what, what thanks shall we render unto him for all the undeserved and invaluable riches of his mercy with which he has favoured us as sinners? Where is the master who deals with his servants, or the father who deals with his children, as God has dealt with us, who were, by wicked works, at enmity with him? For our sakes he spared not his only-begotten Son, but freely gave him as a Mediator, as a Redeemer, a Prophet, Priest and King! For us he delivered him up to death, to the ignominious and painful death of the cross! By this benevolent Saviour he has offered us mercy and life, the forgiveness of our sins, and eternal happiness. He invites us to address ourselves to him with repenting hearts, to forsake the paths of vice and ruin, and to turn to him with sincerity and submission; and as soon as we comply with this kind invitation, he will have compassion upon us, will no longer remember our iniquities, but will receive us unto his mercy, and render us more worthy of his favour. He even condescends to assist us amidst our infirmities, to promote our sanctification and pro-



gress in virtue, and to accept, through his mercy in Christ Jesus, our obedience if sincere, though it be chargeable with innumerable imperfections and defects. Those who trust in him he will never suffer to be tempted beyond their power; and by his providential care and direction he will lead them to the attainment of that glorious inheritance which he has prepared for them in heaven. How great, how inexpressibly great and valuable are all these benefits and blessings! How much greater than we can deserve or could expect! If these reflections do not awaken gratitude and affection, what can? Is it not evident from these considerations that we ought to love God supremely, and that if we do not we must be the most ungrateful and contemptible of all creatures?

To the foregoing considerations let us add that of the intrinsic excellence and manifold utility of love to God. This argument will add strength to those, which we have already urged. What can more agreeably engage the attention of a wise and virtuous mind; what is better calculated to enlarge

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and exalt its capacities and powers; what can yield a more pure, a nobler, a more affecting satisfaction than to cultivate esteem and love to God, to whom in the highest degree, and without any imperfection or shadow of change, belong all those attributes that can command veneration or engage affection; who is the overflowing, yet inexhaustible source of all light and life, all joy and happiness, whose goodness and mercy are from everlasting to everlasting, and who will never cease to crown his servants and friends with blessings and loving-kindness? Sweet and pleasant are those hours which the pious Christian passes in meditating upon the perfections of his God, in worshipping and serving the best of Beings. How compleat is his satisfaction, when, with humble assurance of acceptance, he prostrates himself before the throne of mercy, and holds communion with the Most High!

What is better adapted than love to God to render the cultivation of every virtue, the practice of every duty, easy and delightful? Love is the most strong and active affection



of the soul: where this actuates the heart, nothing is deemed too laborious and difficult, which can promote the end we have in view: it prompts us cheerfully to encounter every difficulty, and boldly to surmount every obstacle, rather than fail to attain the object to which it directs our pursuit. And shall a rational and sincere love to God be less efficacious in inspiring zeal and activity, fortitude and diligence, than the affection we bear to our fellow-creatures? No: when we have duly cultivated love to God, and are properly influenced by it, we shall experience the truth of the apostle's assertion, that "his commandments are not grievous." We shall find a pleasure in obeying them, and "in all things be more than conquerors, through him that loved us." Motives to the performance of our duty will never be wanting to us, and these will influence our conduct with infinitely greater efficacy than human laws or worldly honours possibly can. We shall never be doubtful or hesitate to act agreeably to them; but, inspired with an ardent zeal to approve ourselves to God, we shall become

become "stedfast and unmoveable, always  
"abounding in the work of the Lord,"  
cheerfully persisting in the constant and uni-  
form practice of every virtue.

It is love to God which stamps the highest  
degree of moral worth on piety and virtue,  
and renders them acceptable to the Deity.  
Amidst the different gradations of moral cha-  
racter, and the various tempers and dispo-  
sitions observable among mankind, it is no  
breach of charity to suppose that there may  
be some who abstain from evil and do good  
rather from an apprehension of punishment  
than from love to God, who in the performance  
of duty, pay a greater regard to their own  
advantage than to God and his commands.  
Such we wish not to censure nor discourage,  
because this disposition is perhaps necessari-  
ly the first gradation of the sinner towards  
the reformation of his temper and conduct :  
it is the first step he makes in the ways of  
virtue ; and the more he exercises himself in  
it, the more pleasure will he experience in  
the performance of his duty, and the more  
will his sentiments be purified and exalted.  
Not greater however is the difference be-



tween the child and the slave of a family, than between the pious Christian, whose whole heart is devoted to God, who obeys him with zeal and pleasure, and him who refrains from transgressing the divine commands rather because they cannot be violated with impunity, than because they are the injunctions of the most venerable and amiable of beings. May not therefore the former hope for a much greater portion of the divine favour and approbation, and is he not capable of a much higher degree of happiness than the latter? Lastly, what can be better adapted than love to God to afford consolation in every affliction, to administer fortitude and resolution in every danger, and to inspire the most certain hope of final and perfect happiness? In what situation can we be bereft of consolation, of assistance and support? In what circumstances can we be deprived of tranquillity, while we are thus related to the supreme good, and belong to the blessed society of the friends of God? How encouraging in this view are the divine promises with which we are favoured. "The Lord (says the Psalmist) preserveth all  
" them

“ them that love him. I will be a father  
 “ unto them, and they shall be my sons and  
 “ daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty.  
 “ All things shall work together for good to  
 “ them; neither eye hath seen, nor ear  
 “ heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of  
 “ man to conceive the things which God  
 “ hath prepared for them.” The everlasting  
 doors of heaven shall be opened for their  
 triumphal entry, and they shall receive that  
 crown of immortal life and glory which God  
 hath promised to all who love and serve  
 him.

Let those therefore who have hitherto  
 been indifferent towards God, and neglected  
 to cultivate love to him, consider what sa-  
 cred obligations they have violated, what  
 important privileges they have despised, and  
 what exalted happiness they have forfeited!  
 Ought they not to be humbled at the review  
 of a conduct thus unjust and unnatural?  
 Ought not the forfeiture of these privileges  
 and this felicity to grieve them? Can the  
 advantages of the world, can the pleasures  
 of sin compensate the loss? Can the world  
 bestow that solid and lasting happiness which  
 they



they seek from it? Let it then no longer deceive you: let those who have omitted the duty we are recommending, repair their error while it is yet time, and by sincere repentance seek that God whom they have for so many years neglected. Let them be deeply grieved that they have so long withheld their affections from him who alone deserves them, and wasted them upon unworthy objects. To him let them henceforth consecrate their hearts, with all their inclinations and desires, and be diligent in the use of all those means which may excite and produce love to God. Let them attentively contemplate his perfections, and be ever mindful of the innumerable multitude and inestimable value of his mercies.

Rational affection must be founded in a knowledge of the qualities of its object: these must be viewed in the most striking and affecting light, and compared with those of other objects that are less beautiful, less good and less perfect. In this manner let me exhort you to learn to know God aright. Attend to the manifestations of himself which he has vouchsafed in the book of nature, as well

well as in that of grace. Endeavour to form just, worthy and liberal ideas of him and his perfections. Never represent him under the terrifying image of a severe and inexorable master, more intent upon displaying his infinite power and authority, than upon exercising wisdom, equity and mercy. Never conceive of him as acting merely from the dictates of arbitrary will, without beneficent reasons and purposes; or as dispensing happiness and misery to his subjects, without any regard to the moral worth of their character; or as from all eternity dooming millions of his creatures to everlasting torments, merely to magnify his own glory by displaying the terrors of his power. These ideas of God, which are not warranted either by reason or Scripture, may cause a servile dread, but it is impossible they should ever produce love to him. On the contrary, conceive of God as he really is, a Being not only possessed of infinite power, but also endowed with most perfect wisdom, with the most inviolable sanctity, and with boundless goodness and mercy. Consider the innumerable and glorious displays of these  
attri-



attributes in the creation, preservation and redemption of mankind. Endeavour to excite gratitude in your heart towards the supreme Being. With this view contemplate the number, the magnitude, and the value of those benefits which you daily and hourly receive from God; and to heighten your sense of these, recollect your own unworthiness, the imperfection of your best services, and the innumerable transgressions which you have ungratefully committed against your best benefactor. Consider also how vain and transitory are all worldly possessions and advantages, how insufficient to yield satisfaction, to gratify the vast capacities and desires of your souls, and to render you truly happy. Pay a constant attention to the duties of your station, and to the exercises of devotion, both public and private, and never accustom yourselves to neglect any of them habitually. An attentive and serious application to the discharge of these duties, accompanied with humble and fervent prayer, will make deep and salutary impressions on your minds, will light up in your hearts the calm and steady flame of  
divine

divine love, and feed it with constant supplies.

To those who sincerely love God, I appeal for the truth of what has here been said concerning the felicity resulting from this disposition and temper. And suffer me to exhort you to consider this happiness as your most valuable treasure, carefully to preserve and diligently to improve it. Be particularly watchful against every sinful inclination and action which will gradually alienate you from God, and weaken that satisfaction which results from a sense of his favour. However grieved you must and ought to be, for your many moral infirmities, defects and imperfections, be not discouraged by them; rather let a sense of these convince you of the suitableness of Gospel grace to the nature of man, and of the necessity of greater diligence. Thus may we look forward with hope towards that blessed state of existence where sin and weakness shall be no more; where both our virtue and our happiness shall become more perfect, and where we shall be continually improving in love to God,



God, and in obedience to his commands,  
in the more immediate presence of our Lord  
and Saviour Jesus Christ, through whom be  
glory in the Church throughout all ages.

concerning the liberty relating from this  
disposition and temper. And after we  
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most valuable treasure, carefully to preserve  
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larly watchful against every sinful inclina-  
tion and action which will gradually alienate  
you from God, and weaken that satisfaction  
which results from a state of his favour.  
However give yourself up to him, and ought to  
be for your own good, desires, defects  
and imperfections, encouraged by  
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SER-

## SERMON XIII.

*The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.* PSALM XIX. 8. 2d Clause.

**A**S an inexhaustible fountain, while it emits various streams for the refreshment of man and beast, still continues full and undiminished, so the ever adorable God, being infinitely full and compleat in happiness, delights to communicate it to his creatures, according to their different capacities of enjoyment, and is perpetually doing this throughout the vast range of his works. Of these communications to his creatures in this lower world, man is favoured with the greatest in number, and most exalted in degree. For not to insist on our various intellectual endowments, and the proper objects on which these excellent faculties may exert themselves with perpetual pleasure and advantage; the discoveries, the obligations and comforts of religion are in the highest and most



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most valuable sense communications of happiness.

If we cannot assent to this from the recollection of our own experience, we may conclude it, not only from a due attention to the nature of true religion, but also from the experience of some of the wisest and best of men, whose testimony is recorded in the divine word; and particularly from that of the royal Psalmist in our text. In what a copious, eloquent, and devout strain does he expatiate on this interesting subject! Not content with celebrating the eternal fitness and rectitude of the divine statutes, he endeavours to recommend them by an argument of a less abstract nature, more closely adapted to our feelings and interests, by adding, in the words of our text, that in consequence of their inherent rectitude, they tend to rejoice the heart.

By this however we are not to imagine that the divine statutes, considered only in themselves, or merely as objects of speculation, will produce these happy effects. Neither must we conclude that they will rejoice the hearts of the licentious and worldly-minded,

minded, because the purity of religion is directly contrary to their passions, inclinations and pursuits. Whatever may be the internal excellence of religion, they have no eye to discern, no taste to relish it. Our text therefore refers to those, and to those only, whose minds are alive to religious impressions, and moulded into a prevailing compliance with the genius and demands of the divine law.

It may also be proper to observe, that in treating this subject I shall consider the word statutes, not as signifying merely the positive injunctions of God's revealed will, but as including the whole system of divine precepts, contained in the Scriptures, and especially in the New Testament. These are indeed the statutes or appointments of the Lord, as they are moral truths, exactly consonant to the moral perfections of their divine Author, and strictly conformable to the natural law of reason and conscience, implanted in the heart of man. On this account they are *right*, and also because their injunctions and prohibitions are eternally fit and proper, independent of all will and authority whatever. They are the re-

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sult of the nature of God and man, and of the several relations that subsist between them, and are as necessary to the happiness of our rational and immortal souls, as air and food are to the support of animal life. Such is the goodness and condescension of God, that with our duty he has strictly connected, not only our happiness in general, but even our present pleasure. There is as near and intimate a correspondence between the performance of our duty and true joy of mind, as between the barometer and the weight of the atmosphere; and it will always be found true in experience, that our genuine self-enjoyment will rise or fall, in a degree exactly proportioned to the practical regard we maintain towards the divine word.

Two things are necessary in order to produce true and rational joy in the human mind, objects suited to its faculties, and faculties in proper disposition to receive impressions from them. In each of these views the holy Scriptures, as they contain the divine laws, are calculated to produce this happy temper.

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The objects they propose to the mind are beyond all others suited to its faculties. In general they propose *truth*, which, to a mind properly disposed, is as useful and delightful as light to the eye, when in a sound and healthy state ; but it is also truth, various branches of which are of a nature so interesting and sublime, as to be fully adequate to the capacities and desires of the soul, and this cannot be affirmed of any temporal objects. The Scriptures, and especially the New Testament, represent in the clearest light the attributes and perfections of the ever-blessed God, as most beautifully blended and harmonized in the discoveries of his grace, and in the dispensations of his providence. They call upon us to consider him not only as clothed with awful incomprehensible majesty, but also as infinitely merciful and placable, as publishing terms of pardon and peace to guilty mortals by Jesus Christ, and as reconciling an offending world to himself, not imputing to them their trespasses. They also point out in the plainest manner, that path of duty which must lead us to eternal glory and felicity. They en-



force it by the example of Christ, and by repeated express promises of all suitable assistance and support in every part of it. These objects are so grand and interesting, that nothing can be compared with them, as they evidently relate to our rectitude, dignity and happiness. Temporal objects may for a while gratify and please us, but there are many circumstances in which they fail even in this. They are so disproportioned to the dignity and demands of our immortal nature, that though the want of them gives pain, the possession of them often disappoints our sanguine hopes. But the objects presented to us in the divine word are so agreeable and consonant to our better powers, that they must, beyond all others, be adapted to promote true joy in the mind.

Another thing necessary to true self-enjoyment is, faculties brought into a proper disposition to receive pleasure from these objects. As the human mind, by being continually employed about trifles, is debased and impoverished, so it becomes proportionably enlarged, exalted and ennobled, by being conversant with such objects as are  
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grand and sublime. Such are those presented to us in Scripture, of which we have already taken a transient survey. For the divine word, as it reveals the being, perfection and providence of God, as it announces pardon and peace to penitent offenders, and thus engages us to walk humbly with our God, is adapted to impose a restraint upon our licentious passions, and to bring us into a proper disposition for retaining, as well as receiving, suitable impressions from it. From hence will flow peace of conscience, joy in God as our friend and father, and an increasing desire to approve ourselves to him, by a cordial, constant and universal compliance with his demands in the whole of our practice. Here we shall not find that languor and dissatisfaction which we frequently experience in our best temporal advantages and possessions, when the novelty that excited our ardour in their pursuit has ceased; but in these nobler pursuits, we shall feel a true pleasure and self-enjoyment, which nothing in the world can either impart, or wholly destroy; which will be confirmed by



increasing experience, and while it constitutes our best happiness upon earth, is a foretaste and pledge of more perfect felicity in heaven.

What has here been asserted of all the discoveries and demands of God's revealed will, is particularly applicable to its preceptive part, which has a tendency to rejoice the heart of the sincerely pious, in theory, in practice and on reflection.

With regard to theory or speculation, it affords a noble subject to those who, having received it as the law of their hearts and lives, are careful to cultivate their moral feelings, and to converse frequently and familiarly with themselves. All such, having their perceptions refined and improved, acquire a high relish for the innate excellence of the divine precepts : they perceive their happy tendency to promote the true felicity of man, and rejoice in them when they survey their origin, their rectitude and their harmony. Hence they afford a pleasure beyond what any other subjects can yield, while frequent contemplation upon them in  
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all these views, tends to enlarge, to exalt and ennoble the mind, and gives an increasing participation of the divine nature.

With respect to practice also, the divine precepts have a noble and immediate tendency to rejoice the heart.

It is an opinion industriously propagated by the enemies of virtue, that the practice of religion renders men dull and melancholy; and that its sincere votaries must renounce all happiness in this world, and be contented with beholding it at the tedious distance of another life. But this suggestion is entirely false; for a sincere regard to the discoveries, and consequently, to the precepts of the divine will, is attended with great pleasure in its progress, as well as crowned with unspeakable felicity in its end. There is a noble satisfaction, a god-like pleasure, which immediately springs up in the mind, from the consciousness of having performed our duty; a joy that is not transient and momentary, like the gleam of a meteor, but genial, steady and permanent like the light of the sun. Pleasures of this kind are known by experience to every real



christian, in proportion to the improvement of his temper and conduct, and with them the wicked are utterly unacquainted. This desirable joy of heart arises from every single act of faith and obedience, and while it rewards past and present duty, is an encouragement to the endeavour after greater perfection. If from truly religious principles we relieve the necessitous, or check the impetuosity of some unlawful passion; overcome any strong temptation, or forgive injuries and affronts, we instantly feel the approbation of conscience, like an inward voice whispering to us, "This is the way, walk herein." "The good man," as Solomon justly observes, "is satisfied from himself," not as if his attainments and pleasures were from himself, as their original cause, but from the progress of divine principles in his soul, by which the Holy Spirit of God "bears witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God, and a joint heir with Christ" of the kingdom of glory. The heathens, who had only the light of nature, could assert that virtue was its own reward, and surely the idea of virtue, as displayed  
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and recommended in the Gospel, is not less lovely and eligible than theirs. As the true service of Christ consists in the love and practice of universal righteousness, it is highly suitable to the rational nature of man. It may be summed up in love to God, to Christ, to our neighbour; nor is there any thing harsh, unreasonable or severe, in the whole course of evangelical duty. It is indeed impossible to describe the secret delights and satisfying pleasures which continually spring up in the minds of those who are duly influenced by religion. They can never be fully comprehended except by those who have felt them, and all such will readily testify that the statutes of the Lord rejoice the heart, and that "they have great peace who love his law."

What further evinces the excellence of the divine statutes is, that the joy they inspire is pure and unmixed. No uneasy apprehensions of what may be the final consequences of our obedience can ever haunt or disturb us; whereas the cup of sinful pleasure is often dashed with the bitter ingredients of remorse, suspicion and dread. Many  
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of the common blessings of life, good and desirable as they are in their place, are often mixed with many abating circumstances. Health and strength, genius and learning, power and riches, valuable as they are, often bring many cares with them; and for a great part of the satisfaction to be reaped from them, we are indebted to the favour of friends, or to some other external causes; but the enjoyments of the divine life are not founded on such weak and uncertain supports. Its sources are by no means so shallow and precarious; they exist in the soul, and cannot be destroyed by any thing from without. Riches, liberty, friends, reputation and all our most admired enjoyments, even in their longest duration, must terminate in death; and even before that period arrives, we may be deprived of them. But neither the most formidable power, nor the most cruel treatment, can ever deprive us of the pleasures of a good conscience, or of the approbation and friendship of God, of which they are a proof and assurance. This is a treasure which the good man always carries about him, and of which nothing, except sin, can ever

ever deprive him. When sickness seizes us, embitters all our temporal comforts, and renders our senses incapable of receiving pleasure from their usual objects, even then we are capable, and sometimes *most* capable of relishing that joy of heart, which arises from a lively faith in God, from a sincere and habitual attachment to the divine precepts. There may be, and there often is, an excess of human enjoyment, but the divine pleasure of which we are now speaking admits of no excess, since it is absolutely impossible that we should ever love God too much, or obey him too well. Nor are these joys, like temporal delights, diminished by possession, but the more we pursue them, the keener will be our desire, and the more exquisite our relish of them. The more good we do, the more is the habit strengthened, and with this our delight in it increased: hence we engage in virtuous actions with a vigour and pleasure, which receives no small addition from the remembrance of what we have before done.

But the divine statutes have also a tendency to rejoice the heart of every good man



man upon reflection, as the pleasure resulting from them is not only renewed, but improved by remembrance. No man ever looked back with aversion or remorse upon those parts of his life, in which he steadily maintained his attachment to God, and conscientiously performed his duty. On the contrary, it is the remembrance of such conduct that administers the best comfort amidst the pains of sickness and the infirmities of age; that most effectually blunts the sting of death, and renders a dying bed peaceful and easy. While thousands of the opposite character, upon the approach of the last awful, but inevitable moment, have looked forward to another world with terror, upon reviewing a life spent in the pursuit of vanity, and in continual disregard to the divine will.

The religious joy which arises immediately from reflection on a virtuous practice, increases the sublime pleasure which springs up in the mind of the good man, when he contemplates his relation to his God and Saviour. It strengthens his confidence in the protection and promises of the Almighty,

ty, and invigorates his hopes of glory, honour and immortality.

The design of the Gospel, in all its institutions and requirements, is to raise us from the depths of sin and misery, and to form us to the true enjoyment of God and of ourselves. A practical regard to it is, properly speaking, nothing else but a course of right self-enjoyment, since it requires of us to keep our passions within due bounds, and in subservience to our reason. It allows us to use the good things of life with moderation, the only way in which we can truly enjoy them. It tends to render us humble towards God, just and charitable towards our fellow-creatures; and is it not evident, that in proportion as we comply with it we shall be easy and happy? Hence then we may justly infer, that those professed Christians greatly injure the Gospel and mistake its nature, who by their temper and behaviour make it appear to others as of a gloomy and melancholy tendency. The religion of such is founded in erroneous notions, is uncomfortable to themselves, and discouraging to others. Let us therefore guard against this,

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as well as against that licentious levity which constitutes the opposite extreme, and endeavour to be easy and cheerful in our Christian course, that while we enjoy pleasure in ourselves, we may impart it to others, and beget in them a just and good opinion of that religion which tends to inspire and cherish it. Let us also be thankful to God, that he has not only connected this pleasure with the sincere and constant practice of religion, but has graciously appointed an eternity of happiness hereafter, as the reward of a life spent in the best enjoyment here. This proves him to be in the highest degree good and benevolent: it demonstrates, that so far from having any design contrary to the true felicity of man, he rewards him in proportion as he labours to promote his highest interest, and punishes him only in proportion as he neglects it.

To conclude, let those who are strangers to religion seriously consider these things, and thus become partakers of true happiness. There is nothing worthy of this exalted name in the paths of sin; the joys there found are tumultuous and transient, and by  
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whatever alluring appellations an unthinking world may dignify them, the word of God, and the testimony of all wise and good men, pronounce them folly, distraction and ruin, as they arise from the most debasing and dishonourable sources, even an ignorance of God, of ourselves and of our best interests. How long then, O ye scorers! will ye delight in misery, and ye simple! will ye love folly? Do you plead difficulties to be overcome? You make no scruple to pursue the vanities of the world with incredible toil and slavery; pride and vain-glory with all their anxiety and danger; luxury and intemperance with all that expence and pain, both of body and mind, which is inseparably connected with them. The pleasures of sin you can have only for a season; and think what a dreadful account must follow, when, for all these things, God shall bring you into judgment! Sinful pleasure cannot be purchased but at the price of your souls; and if this, as our blessed Lord observes, is too much for the possession of the *whole* world, it must surely be infinitely too much to be given for a very small part of it. Turn then  
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to God in his appointed way of repentance, faith and obedience! Turn to him as the source and center of your happiness, that you may be reconciled to him, that you may enjoy his favour and blessing, and feel that divine pleasure which arises from obedience. Thus shall we experience the truth of what has now been advanced, and at all times have this for our rejoicing, "even the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we maintain our conversation in the world," and are blessed with the heart-cheering prospects of direction through life, of support in death, and of eternal felicity in the presence of our God.



## S E R M O N XIV.

*He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death, tarry ye here and watch with me.*

MATT. XXVI. 37, 38.

**C**OULD we accurately trace the history of some of the best of men who have been the greatest benefactors, and have afforded the most excellent examples to mankind, perhaps we should often find that they have, in a great measure, been qualified for becoming thus eminently useful by a series of afflictions in early life. Trained up in this school of providence, they were fortified against the seducing allurements of pleasure, and were formed to habits of patience, circumspection, diligence and submission. By these their minds were steeled, and rendered firm to combat all opposition, and at

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length to rise with a noble superiority over all the difficulties that might beset them.

This was eminently the case of our blessed Lord, who, in his relative character as the great Captain of salvation to all his faithful followers, was through suffering made perfect for this exalted office. His trials began very early in life, but were most remarkable from the commencement of his public ministry till his death. In this short interval of about three years, his life was almost one continued series of distresses, that followed each other in a very rapid succession. Yet great as these were, they were far exceeded by those which beset him from the conclusion of the Paschal Supper to the time of his being apprehended, tried, condemned and crucified. This short interval was filled up with much more severe distress than ever before or since has fallen to the lot of any of the sons of men, and recommends him to our regard, as that "man of sorrows" and acquainted with grief," whom the evangelical prophet Isaiah had foretold.

It is upon one of the most remarkable and instructive scenes of these extraordinary trials

trials that I would now wish to fix your attention; and may we so attend to our great master's edifying example, that our faith and attachment to him, our patience and submission under the hand of God, and our Christian fortitude and diligence may be happily improved by the survey. ✓

The facts related by our evangelist in the text and following verses, happened in the garden of Gethsemane, whither he had retired with his disciples, with a full knowledge of what he was to undergo, and with a determined resolution to face the storms of affliction which beat so heavily upon him. ✓

The first circumstance of this transaction which claims our attention is, that our Lord selected only three disciples to be witnesses of what he was then to suffer. We are told that when he entered the garden, he left the greater part of his disciples just within the gate, saying to them, "Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder." Probably knowing the weakness of their faith, he was certain that they would immediately and entirely renounce his cause had they been permitted



to behold what he was then about to suffer. For which reason he mentioned only a part of his design in the words just cited, leaving them to be informed of the rest of it at a more convenient season. In this he displayed the most wise and prudent concern for their best interests. He took with him further into the garden only Peter, James and John, three disciples whom he had always distinguished on account of their particular attachment to him : St. Peter for the fervour of his friendship and zeal ; St. John, his yet more intimate and beloved disciple, for the natural sweetness and affection of his temper ; and St. James on account of his firmness and constancy. While he sincerely loved all his disciples, he had, for the above reasons, a particular affection for these three, and some time before had honoured them with new names, expressive of his warm approbation of their respective characters. To Simon he gave the surname of Peter, or Cephas, which signifies a rock, and that of Boanerges, or sons of thunder, to James and John, to denote their intrepidity in their future ministry, and the success with which it

it should be attended. It was likely that these three disciples would be less apt to be offended at his sufferings than the rest, because fortified by some peculiar favours he had formerly conferred upon them. He had honoured them above their brethren, by permitting them to accompany him to the mount of transfiguration, where they beheld him in a wonderful manner clothed with the shekinah or divine glory, "when his face shone like the sun, and his raiment was white as the light;" where they saw Moses and Elias talking with him concerning his approaching death, and heard that voice from heaven which pronounced him to be the well-beloved Son of God, and as such commanded them to hear him. On this mournful occasion they would naturally recollect the glory with which they had seen him invested on the mount, and that testimony of those two prophets, and even of God himself to the divinity of his person and mission, which they at that time heard. Hence they would obviously be led to conclude, when they saw him oppressed with sorrow, that God, who had thus expressly



approved him as his beloved Son, would not fail to support him.

There was also something in the character and conduct of these three favoured apostles, which rendered our blessed Master's choice of them on this occasion peculiarly proper. St. Peter was animated with a very high degree of personal regard for his Lord, which had often swelled into presumption; he had boasted that he would follow him, not only to prison, but even to death, and cheerfully lay down his life for him: he sincerely meant what he then affirmed, his only fault was, that he over-rated his fortitude, and depended too much upon his own strength. St. James and St. John, under the firm persuasion that Christ, as the Messiah, was to be a triumphant temporal prince, had flattered themselves with the hope of being the chief ministers of his kingdom, and had presumed so far upon this splendid dream, that they had incurred the indignation of all the other apostles. So fully were they persuaded of their capacity for this exalted station, that when Jesus by way of reproof asked them, "Are ye able to drink of  
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“the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” they answered, “we are able.” Their zeal, like that of St. Peter, was sincere, but was unhappily under the direction of an ambition as blind as it was aspiring. He therefore selected these three apostles, in order to convince them by this scene, that to combat such heavy trials as his, with courage, dignity and success, was by no means so easy as they had vainly imagined.

Here, as in many other circumstances of his life, our blessed Lord extended his views far beyond them to his future Church in all succeeding ages. He was desirous that this humiliating scene should be recorded in a manner as circumstantial as those more splendid parts of his history, his miracles, his resurrection, or his ascension to glory. It was therefore proper that this melancholy event should take place in presence of two or three witnesses, who might certify the fact to the world. These seem to have been the reasons for his selecting these three disciples, who, as his favoured friends, were most



worthy of his confidence, and were less liable than the rest to be offended at his sufferings.

Another circumstance which demands our attention is the severe distress which he then underwent. In going with them to the scene of this calamitous event, he began to unbo-  
som himself concerning the sharp affliction with which his heart was then torn, saying to them, in all the confidence of the warmest friendship, "My soul is exceeding sorrow-  
ful even to death." The sufferings which he was to endure on that spot were so distressing that his humanity relented on their approach, and made him utter this poignant complaint. After having declared to his disciples the extreme sorrow with which he was afflicted, he said to them "Tarry ye here and watch with me." He seems to have sought some consolation from the sympathy of his faithful friends, whom he selected to be witnesses of his extreme sufferings, and of his perfect resignation to the divine will, that he might form them to the same temper and render them instrumental to inculcate it on others, in the course of their future

future ministry. He also advised them to employ the time in watchfulness and prayer for themselves, that they might not enter into temptation, and might be preserved amidst the approaching trial of their attachment to him.

As soon as he had given this order to his disciples, we are informed by St. Matthew "that he went forward a little," and by St. Luke that "he withdrew about a stone's cast," a distance so small, that as it was then about the time of the full moon these three disciples might easily see and hear what passed. There St. Luke tells us that "he kneeled and prayed," and St. Matthew that "he fell on his face." He probably began his prayer in a kneeling posture, till wrought up by the ardour of his devotions, he prostrated himself with his face to the ground.

The Jews generally prayed standing, as is evident from many passages both of the Old and New Testament. This they do to this day in compliance with the customs of their ancestors. They were not however wholly confined to this posture, for it appears



appears from the sacred writings that they  
 sometimes prayed kneeling. This posture  
 however was seldom used, except in some  
 extraordinary cases, such as in any great af-  
 fliction, whether personal or national, when  
 they usually began their prayers upon their  
 knees, and as the fervour of their devotions  
 increased, lay prostrate on the ground. In  
 this I believe they are followed by the mo-  
 dern Jews, on their great day of expiation,  
 and on their fast, on account of the destruc-  
 tion of the city and temple of Jerusalem by  
 the Romans. Thus our blessed Lord, con-  
 forming to the customs of his countrymen  
 in their extraordinary devotions, as he ad-  
 vanced in his prayer prostrated his face to  
 the earth. In this humble and affecting pos-  
 ture, he pronounced one of the best peti-  
 tions that was ever offered to God: "O my  
 " Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass  
 " from me! nevertheless not as I will, but  
 " as thou wilt." He has recourse in this  
 place to a metaphorical expression common-  
 ly used by the Jews, and frequent in the  
 Old Testament, where the term *cup* often  
 signifies any event, lot, or portion whether  
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good or evil, assigned by Providence to any of the sons of men. Thus we read of "the cup of blessing," "the cup of salvation," and "the cup of affliction."

Here then this question naturally arises, what particular affliction our Lord meant by this cup, from which he thus earnestly prayed to be delivered. Some suppose that he here referred to his death upon the cross; but this, in my opinion, is scarcely probable. This event he had, from the commencement of his ministry, foreseen, and frequently foretold; this he had often declared himself determined to undergo at the time appointed by his Father. We have a remarkable instance of this deliberate purpose in St. John xii. 27, 28, where, with a little difference from our version in the pointing, which both the original text and common sense require, he thus expresses himself: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say, Father! save me from this hour?" (meaning his approaching death) but for "this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name!" That it was not the fear of dying on the cross that made him pray



pray in the manner here related, is further evident from this circumstance, that to suppose it would greatly degrade his character. Suppose his sufferings as terrible as possible, clothe them with all the aggravating circumstances imaginable, yet if no more is included in them than the pains of death; for Jesus to have shrunk at the prospect of them, when his humanity was strengthened far beyond the common pitch of mortals, would suppose him to betray a weakness, to which many celebrated heroes of Pagan antiquity were strangers, and to which even many of the followers of Christ were superior, when, for their attachment to his cause, they submitted without the least reluctance to death in its most dreadful and agonizing forms. Hence it should appear, that by the pointed expression *this cup*, our Lord prayed to be delivered, not from his approaching death, but from the severe distress which he at that time endured; and to this the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews seems to refer, when he observes that he "was heard in that he feared."

St. Matthew and Mark inform us that our  
blessed

blessed Lord repeated this fervent prayer  
 three times, and without doubt he added  
 more than is here recorded. This was cus-  
 tomary among the Jews in seasons of more  
 than common distress; accordingly St. Paul  
 tells us that when under a severe trial, which  
 he calls the messenger of Satan, "he be-  
 fought the Lord thrice, that it might de-  
 part from him." In conformity with this  
 prevailing custom our Saviour thrice repeat-  
 ed his supplication, and the fervour of his  
 devotions increased as his terrors were mul-  
 tiplied. He here admirably exemplified his  
 own lesson, in the parable of the importu-  
 nate widow, "that men ought always to  
 pray and not to faint."

While thus fervently addressing himself  
 to his heavenly Father, his agony of mind  
 rose to such a degree that, as St. Luke re-  
 lates, "his sweat was as it were great drops of  
 blood falling down to the ground. The most  
 rational commentators, among whom is the  
 learned Grotius, have taken this expression  
 in a metaphorical sense, as signifying only  
 an excessive and profuse sweat which fell  
 from him in great drops, resembling in con-  
 sistence



sistence and size only, drops of blood. Others have observed, that the Greek particle, which is rendered *as it were*, sometimes denotes not merely similitude, but reality, and suppose that our Lord's sweat on this occasion was really mixed with blood to such a degree, that its colour and consistence was as if it had been wholly blood. In support of this opinion many cases of such sweats have been related \*. Not to detain you with these, I shall observe, that this conflict of our blessed Lord is, by St. Luke, with great propriety denominated an agony, which term is often used by the Greek writers to express the anxiety and disquietude of a general, when preparing to give a decisive battle, from the uncertainty of the event, and an apprehension of its vast impor-

\* Voltaire, an author not to be suspected of favouring Christianity, in his Universal History, thus speaks of the death of Charles IX. of France, on whose name the horrid massacre of the Protestants on St. Bartholomew's day has stamped eternal infamy. "The malady of which he died was very extraordinary; his blood gushed out through all his pores. This accident, of which there are some instances on record, was owing either to excessive fear, to a violent passion, or to a warm and melancholy constitution."

tance to his country and himself. This word is therefore justly applied to our Lord's distress on this melancholy occasion, as he was then about to enter upon a conflict of the utmost importance, not to a particular country, but to mankind at large. But his heavenly Father did not leave him. Though the cup did not pass away from him, he was enabled to drink it even to the dregs, and was carried triumphantly through all the bitterness of his trials, from which, like the sun when it has been for some time darkened with an eclipse, his character broke forth and shone with improved lustre.

Several interesting particulars relating to this portion of our Lord's sufferings remain to be considered; but as the time will not permit me to examine them fully, I shall defer them to another opportunity.

In the mean time, and as a proper conclusion to what has now been offered, let us attend to some important truths suggested by this account.

Hence then the christian may learn that heavy afflictions are no absolute marks of the divine displeasure. Even when inflicted  
upon



upon the wicked and abandoned, though they are the just punishment of sin, they are still full of mercy in their design, and their severity is tempered with kindness in the intention with which they are dispensed. They are designed on the part of God to rouse sinners from the thoughtlessness with which they proceed in their dangerous course, to make them feel their own insufficiency and emptiness and that of all earthly comforts, to bring them to serious consideration—to lead them to inquire why God sends with them—to render them sensible of the evil and danger of their vicious conduct, to humble them in deep repentance—to make them fervent in their supplication for pardon—to incline them to seek the salvation offered in the gospel, and to comply with the terms upon which alone it can be obtained—to render sin hateful to them—by degrees to subdue and cure this fatal malady of the soul, and form them to moral health and vigour of mind, that from being the slaves of iniquity, they may become servants of righteousness and heirs of the grace of life. Afflictions, under the di-  
vine

vine blessing, have been the happy means of thus transforming some of the worst offenders; so as to render them sincere penitents, and as eminent for their piety and virtue as they had once been for the contrary character.

If we may thus reason concerning severe afflictions with relation even to the wicked and profane, much more may we venture to affirm that they are no absolute marks of divine displeasure when inflicted upon those who are, in the main, pious and virtuous Christians. Our blessed Redeemer was eminently "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" and the apostle represents the great Captain of our salvation as "made perfect through suffering." Can we then wonder that God often tries the best of his followers by severe afflictions? He thus deals with them to improve their virtues, particularly those of a passive nature, which are chiefly exercised and strengthened by adversity. By these dispensations he prevents them from contracting too fond an affection for this alluring world; and proves that religion affords the most solid support,

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and most animating consolations under those afflictions which are common to all mankind, and which sinners as well as saints are often obliged to undergo.

Should therefore afflictions be the portion of any of you, remember that your heavenly Father dealt thus, though in a degree much more severe, with his beloved Son in his agony; and that the same love which held out this cup of affliction to the Captain of your salvation, calls you, in your measure, to drink of it, that you, in your degree, may be made perfect to serve God and obtain his glory, as your divine Leader was. "Strengthen," therefore, O dejected Christian, "the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees." Faint not in the day of adversity, but remember the exhortation that speaks to you as children, and which in the agony of Christ addresses you in a manner the most forcible and engaging. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is there whom the father chasteneth not? We have

“ have had fathers of our flesh who correct-  
 “ ed us, and we gave them reverence, shall  
 “ we not much more be in subjection to the  
 “ Father of spirits and live? For they ve-  
 “ rily for a few days chastened us after their  
 “ own pleasure, but he for our profit, that  
 “ we might be partakers of his holiness.”

Hence we may also learn, that prayer and resignation are the most effectual supports under afflictions. If a Christian neglects these, in vain will he apply to worldly comforts; they may flatter, but they cannot relieve; and, like the feeble reed, will fail under the pressure, and wound the hand that reclines upon them. Prayer and resignation were the supports of our blessed Lord at all times, and especially in the trying scenes of which we have just taken a survey; and these are the only effectual supports of his followers. Indeed sincere and humble prayer will naturally produce resignation, while this, in its turn, will administer confidence and fervour to prayer. But as you would wish to reap these consolations from religion, let me intreat you to make a devotional temper and practice habitual to you, by the frequent



exercise of prayer throughout the whole of  
 your lives, daily applying with humble filial  
 boldness to the throne of God, that "you  
 may receive mercy to pardon, and grace  
 to help you in every time of need."



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## SERMON XV.

*And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*

ST. LUKE xxii. 43, 44, 45, 46.

**I**T is an observation of the celebrated Seneca, that “there is not in the whole world an object more worthy of our attention, and even of that of heaven, than a good man acquitting himself with patience, fortitude and resignation, under heavy and undeserved afflictions.” The justice of this observation is obvious; nor has any person ever yet existed to whom it can be so fully applied as to our blessed Lord: it agrees with his life in general, but is more



particularly applicable to him during his agony, and all the scenes which in rapid succession followed this, till they were closed by his ignominious crucifixion.

In what has been already treated in a former discourse, we offered some conjectures on the cause of our Lord's selecting three disciples to be more immediately present during his agony, together with a few observations on his agony and prayer, from which some practical remarks were deduced, tending to comfort the afflicted, and to excite all, from the example of our blessed Saviour, to form themselves to habits of prayer and resignation.

Let us now inquire what were probably the immediate causes of his distressing agony. Many divines have supposed that his distress in this scene was occasioned by his being for that time the real object of God's wrath and indignation. This however is much easier to be affirmed than proved, and implies an opinion that is by no means honourable either to our blessed Saviour or to his heavenly Father. In opposition to this gloomy hypothesis, it may be observed, that in the  
history

history of Christ's passion, we have not one instance of his having any apprehension of the interruption of his Father's love; on the contrary, he always prays to him in the most perfect confidence of his affection. A little before this, and in full resolution to devote himself to that death for which he came into the world, he had said, "Father, glorify thy name." He breathes the same sentiment in that animated and pathetic prayer in the 17th chapter of St. John, where he deliberately devotes himself to death in those remarkable words with which this prayer begins; "Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son that thy Son also may be glorified in thee." Here, as well as in the prayer in his agony, he calls upon God as his Father whom he loved, and by whom he was still beloved with a reciprocal affection. And after this can we suppose that he was at this time the real object of God's displeasure? It is indeed true that he suffered for the sins of mankind, but it is equally true that he was a willing victim, and suffered voluntarily, "the just for the unjust." Accordingly his death upon the cross is said to have been a sa-



crifice with which God was well pleased, and in allusion to the offering of incense under the law, "an offering of a sweet-smelling "favour acceptable to God;" since his submitting to the death of the cross was only the concluding step of the most perfect obedience and love to his heavenly Father, and of benevolence to his faithful followers, we may reasonably suppose that he was never more dear to God than when he suffered in the garden, and afterwards on the cross.

Various circumstances may be assigned as the immediate causes of his agony, without supposing that he was the object of God's indignation either on this or on any other occasion.

If we attend to the New Testament, we find that when Christ came into the world, he assumed our nature, attended with all the feelings, passions and unavoidable infirmities of humanity, that "being made like unto "his brethren, and tempted (or rather tried) "in all points, as we are, though without "sin," he might in all respects be a complete example of obedience to his followers. There are men indeed who, from a natural  
insen-

insensibility of heart, and hardness of disposition, are strangers to apprehension, either for themselves or others. These meet danger with a boldness, which is often derived from constitution rather than from principle, and for these to acquire fortitude from reason or religion, is comparatively an easy task. But natural endowments of this kind, which are peculiar to a few, were by no means suited to a person who was designed by Providence as an universal example. Accordingly we find nothing of this kind in the character of Christ, who was of a disposition peculiarly mild and tender, of exquisite sensibility, and susceptible of all the soft and melting tones of humanity. Of this we find many instances in his history. At the grave of Lazarus, though he knew that he should soon restore him to life and to his friends, he was so deeply affected that he wept. Though well acquainted with the malignant hatred of the Jews towards him, and with the cruel treatment which their council and the ecclesiastical government of Jerusalem would inflict upon him, yet he shed tears over this devoted city, upon  
a view



a view of the dreadful calamities which would befall it in consequence of their execrable barbarity to him. Though we never find our Lord deficient in firmness upon proper occasions, yet his fortitude always appears to be the result of principle, rather than of constitution, and though it enabled him to encounter every distress and difficulty, when the interests of his mission required it, yet it was not of that ostentatious nature, as to lead him either to court needless danger, or to affect an appearance of insensibility to the evils which awaited him. To a person of our Lord's temper there were many circumstances in the scenes now before him, which might deeply affect him; and this sensibility, so far from impeaching his fortitude, sets it in a more amiable point of light. He was now upon the spot where he was to prepare to meet his sufferings. To connect ideas of events with places is natural to the mind. Had we a cause to litigate; or were we called upon to defend our country, the entrance into the court of judicature, or the first view of the field of battle, would probably give a more warm and sensible

sible turn to the affections and passions than we should feel during the whole of the trial or in the actual engagement. And if this was not exactly the case with our Lord, yet as he came hither on purpose to prepare himself to meet his sufferings, these, with all their train of circumstances and consequences, must necessarily be presented in full view to his imagination. By a mind like his the prospect of a personal disgrace and pain would probably be more easily surmounted, than many other circumstances that related to the cause for which he was to suffer. Yet it is possible that in order to render the display of his fortitude more illustrious, the apprehension of the dreadful death he was to undergo, might be permitted to make a deeper impression at that time than ordinary upon his mind. But through the whole of his sufferings, as well as in his life, he expressed more concern for others than for himself; and we may therefore suppose that, on this occasion, his sensibility was excited more on account of those for whom he suffered, than from any personal apprehensions of pain, distress or ignominy. This com-  
 passion



passion evidently appears in his discourse to the women who followed him. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." He saw that one of his disciples would basely betray him, that another would deny him, that all would desert him, that by their rejection and cruel treatment of him, his countrymen would draw down the severest calamities upon themselves, that, in the most aggravated sense, "his blood would be upon them and upon their children." All these were ideas which then presented themselves to his mind, and which could not but deeply affect a heart endued with exquisite sensibility. To these were added other views more extensive, and therefore to his capacious soul more affecting. Such were the lively and formidable views of the odious deformity of sin, and the fatal effects of moral disorder in the works of God; objects which, to a mind so enlightened, so pure and benevolent, must have appeared in their true malignity and mischievous consequences. He felt, severely felt, for all mankind: felt the most heart-wringing compassion for a world  
 "dead

“ dead in trespasses and sins ;” for multitudes whom he saw wantonly sporting with destruction, and obstinately rushing into it. With what additional anguish must his soul have been wrung, when he foresaw that, after all the affecting proofs of his love and concern, his gracious offers would be slighted by a thoughtless ungrateful world ; that thousands who were called by his name, would reflect disgrace upon his cause, and by their sins and persecuting spirit crucify “ anew the Lord of life, and put him to “ open shame.”

By being most exquisitely sensible of this severe distress, our blessed Saviour became not only an illustrious example of that true fortitude, which, upon religious principles, overcomes the natural sense and apprehension of evil ; but also a remarkable instance of the efficacy of resignation and prayer in drawing down assistance from the throne of God. The Father of Mercies was pleased to give him a visible token of his being heard, for St. Luke informs us that there appeared to him an angel from heaven strengthening him.

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The last circumstance in this account of which we shall take notice is the frailty of his disciples during this scene, and his behaviour towards them on this occasion.

At first view it may seem astonishing that they could yield to sleep when they saw the extreme distress of their Master, and after he had expressly desired them to watch with him. Their drowsiness however did not proceed from indifference or insensibility. They sincerely loved their Lord, and loved him at that time as much as ever; but perhaps as they heard him pray so fervently that if it were possible God would permit "this cup to pass away from him," they might conclude that his sorrows would immediately cease, and that there was no need for their watching any longer. St. Luke tells us that they slept from sorrow: nor is this unlikely; for though care and disquietude will often prevent sleep, sorrow, when long and excessive, sometimes exhausts the spirits and inclines to heaviness. It ought also to be observed, as some excuse for their frailty, that for some days and nights preceding, they had been much fatigued and

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exhausted with long watchings, and with excessive grief on their Master's account and on their own.

We are naturally led here to observe what was the conduct of these disciples on a former occasion, when on perceiving Christ sleeping in their company, they rashly imagined that he neglected them. The passage to which I refer is recorded in the close of St. Mark v. We are there informed that a furious tempest arising while they were crossing the lake of Gennefaret, Jesus, wearied with the fatigues he had undergone, amidst all the horrors of the storm sunk into profound sleep. Alarmed at the danger of their situation, they awakened him with their cries, and forgetting the respect they owed him, presumed so far as to accuse him of neglect, saying to him, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" This charge was equally indiscreet and unjust; but their Lord excused it on account of the weakness of their faith and the strength of their fears.

But how widely different from this, was his behaviour to them when he found them sleeping during his agony!—No anger, no  
severe



severe reproach escaped from his lips; but all that he said was kind and gentle like himself. Three times he found them sleeping, when, during the short intervals between each of his prayers, he came to them. The first time he addressed himself principally to St. Peter, saying, "Simon, sleepest thou?" Thou who hast been so forward to declare thy readiness to die with and for me, "couldst thou not watch with me one hour?" to which he added "watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation:" that is, If ye will not watch with *me*, watch and pray for yourselves, that ye may not fail under the heavy trials which are soon coming upon you. But how generous and friendly is the excuse he makes for their conduct! "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." How affectionate this remark, in which he acknowledges the sincerity of their professed affection for him, and places their negligence to the account of human frailty! His joining this kind apology to his reproof is the more worthy of notice, as his mind was at that time discomposed with sorrow, which must have made him more keenly feel any appear-

appearance of neglect on the part of his intimate friends. Finding at last that what he had said failed to rouse them from their heaviness, he added, as the expression ought to be rendered, "Do you sleep on now and take your rest? behold the hour is at hand; rise, let us be going, behold he is at hand that doth betray me." This shews that Christ perfectly knew the precise moment in which he should be betrayed; and hence it appears that his placing his other disciples just within the garden-door and ordering them to watch, was not because he needed to be informed of the approach of Judas, but only to make trial of their constancy and vigilance, and thus to convince them that these were not so great as they had fondly imagined.

Having thus considered the several particulars of this remarkable account, permit me to observe, that it affords a strong presumption of the fidelity of the evangelists in writing their history. This scene reflected no honour upon themselves, nor, in the eye of the world, upon their master. It was a secret transaction to which no mortal

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except these three disciples was witness. Pilate saw nothing of degradation in the behaviour of Christ, who spoke to him with all that dignity and firmness which became the Son of God; so likewise he behaved before Caiaphas and Herod. There was a sublime heroism in every thing he said or did in the presence of these haughty rulers, which manifested his superiority even to the judges before whom he was arraigned. From the instant he was seized till the moment in which he breathed out his departing spirit into the hands of his Father, he displayed an easy grandeur of character without the least ostentation, a patience, consistency and dignity of mind that was invincible. In a word Christ never appeared dejected except in the presence of God and of these three disciples. No human being except themselves, possessed this important secret. We may therefore presume, especially as it reflects censure on their own behaviour, that they would never have revealed it, and that the other evangelists, as informed by them, would never have committed it to writing, had they not been more swayed by the love  
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of truth than by any other motive whatever. This shews them to be some of the most faithful historians that ever existed; and entitles their narrations to our full and absolute credit.

How numerous are the valuable lessons which may be deduced from this account of our great master's abasement. Is it a commendable Christian quality to be ready to undergo the most severe distresses, and to face the most formidable dangers in obedience to the will of God, whenever we are called out to heavy trials? Are patience, resignation and fervent prayer, some of the brightest ornaments and firmest supports of the Christian character, especially under circumstances of complicated distress? Does a superiority to peevishness and ill-natured censure, under the neglect of our intimate friends, even when we have the most need of their assistance, indicate a great and good mind? Does it afford peace to him who upon principle practises it, and conciliate the affection of those to whom it is shewn?—All these valuable lessons may be learnt from the instructive example of our Lord. All these,

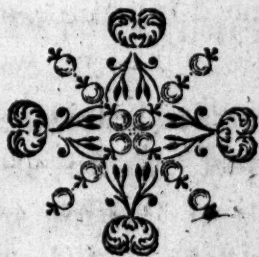


permit me to add, we ought to learn from the part of his history which we have now surveyed, which was recorded for this among other purposes. If you neglect to transcribe this example in your hearts and lives, you will be inexcusable, and you will be punished for it by a proportionable deficiency in your virtues and comforts. Let therefore the love which he manifested for you in these sufferings animate yours to him, and be careful to express it by an increasing obedience, a closer imitation, a more firm reliance upon him as your all-sufficient Saviour.

Hence also let the careless habitual sinner dread the divine displeasure, and be induced to turn from the evil of his ways, and to do that which is lawful and right, that he may save his soul alive. For as our Lord elsewhere observes, "If these things are done  
"in the green tree, what shall be done  
"in the dry?" If he, perfectly innocent, though he voluntarily suffered, "the  
"just for the unjust," felt so much sorrow and distress, how dreadful must be those terrors that will crush the finally impenitent in the day of his power, when all who have  
refused

refused to submit to the extended sceptre of his mercy, shall fall beneath the awful rod of his justice.

In short, let us all consider our personal concern in these important facts, and may God render them everlastingly beneficial to us.





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This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some minor discoloration and small dark spots, possibly due to age or handling. A vertical crease is visible near the right edge, suggesting it was once part of a bound volume. The overall tone is a warm, off-white or light beige.

## S E R M O N XVI.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.* 1 PETER i. 3, 4, 5.

**D**EELY penetrated as the Apostles were with a sense of the importance and excellence of the gospel, it is no wonder that we should find their epistles abounding with congratulations to those, who were partakers of its benefits; and with grateful ascriptions of praise to God, for his manifestation of his gracious design in favour of lost mankind. Of this nature is the passage now read, which contains a noble summary



of our privileges and hopes as Christians. It is therefore highly worthy of your attention; and in discoursing upon it I shall endeavour to explain the words in their natural connection and order, and point out the important truths they suggest.

Praise is here ascribed to God, "who according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope."—If these words be taken in a limited sense, they may be considered as referring to God, the original cause of this salvation, as he is therein entitled and revealed to us in the relation of our heavenly Father. If they be extended to a larger meaning, they will then further include the natural evidences of the human mind in favour of a future state, derived from the rational hope and expectation of it, as well as the more clear and positive discoveries of it by the gospel revelation. In the former sense, the meaning will be—that the same almighty Being, who condescends to style himself our heavenly Father, who has begotten us from nothing, and made large provision for the supply of all our wants in this world; from his own essential

fential goodness and divine benignity, has in the same sense begotten us to a more exalted state of existence, and raised us to higher honours and dignity; to glory more permanent and illustrious than any this world can afford, and to hopes of better things than earth with all its riches can bestow.

If we consider the words in the latter sense, as referring to the natural evidences of the human mind in favour of a future state, the reasoning will run in the following train.—Blessed be that God, who, in the original constitution of our intelligent nature, formed us with souls capable of reflecting upon his perfections, and of entertaining hopes of happiness more durable than any this state can afford; and who from the same mercy and goodness, when men had perverted the moral powers and capacities of their minds, and had sunk the very *hope* of immortal felicity in a sordid attachment to this world, interposed to save them from this most dreadful ruin; and, by the revelation of his will and of a future life, begat them again to *that hope* of an immortal incorruptible state, which, by depraving their nature, they had entirely lost.

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There seems to be reason for believing that this more extensive meaning is contained in the words of the text: not only from the presumption that mankind originally entertained some apprehensions of a future state; but from the certainty of the degeneracy of men's minds, when the gospel was made known. Whence we may safely conclude, that the natural evidences of a future state, even where admitted, were not, in general, sufficient motives to virtue; and therefore mankind needed the confirmation of these, in a manner that should excite their attention, and make these truths prevailing principles of obedience.

The history of the world affords strong reasons for believing that the human mind has never been without such evidence of a future state as, if duly attended to, might have been convincing. This is confirmed by a comparison of the Old and New Testament. We are told in the epistle to the Hebrews, that those excellent worthies whose names stand enrolled as examples of virtue, "lived by that faith, which was the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence

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“ dence of things not seen :” that the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while they lived in Canaan, sought a better, a heavenly country, confessing themselves pilgrims and strangers upon earth. St. Paul makes this also the belief of the ten tribes, grounded upon the promises made to their fathers. In short, after ages that had never received the Scriptures as the oracles of God, in general allowed the doctrine of a future state, though from the ignorance and depravity of mankind it was obscured by the mixture of fabulous inventions, by which its evidence was so weakened, that its moral influence was nearly destroyed.

But Christians may with the utmost propriety be said to be “ begotten again to a “ lively hope,” because to them immortality is proposed anew, as an express sanction of the law of the Gospel, and confirmed “ by “ the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the “ dead.”

As the evidences arising from reason were not sufficient to render the belief of a future state influential on the conduct of mankind, and productive of correspondent rectitude  
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and holiness of life; it seemed highly expedient that when this doctrine was re-published, some striking evidence should be given in order to establish the authority of the person by whom it was promulgated, and some illustrious proof, or instance, to induce mankind to the belief of it. Accordingly we find that our Lord not only wrought many remarkable and well-attested miracles, but raised several persons to life who had been really dead, nay one who had been actually buried. When his enemies demanded a particular and evident sign of his being the Son of God, and a proof that his authority was sufficient to enforce the belief of a future state, Jesus places the whole evidence of these two important points upon his own resurrection. This declaration was sufficient to set them upon their guard, and to caution them against any collusion in the event. Accordingly we find all imaginable care taken to stop the credit of our Lord's divine character and authority, by every method that was pursued to detect, if possible, the supposed imposture of his resurrection; but all these precautions remarkably tended to substantiate

stantiate the truth of that fact, and to prove that authority which they were designed to invalidate and destroy; and served to afford the fullest evidence "that Jesus was a prophet mighty indeed before God and all the people." This was not only an astonishing miraculous event, but was such as could not fail to convince mankind of the divine mission and authority of our Saviour. He had declared a future state to the world—he had spoken of the general resurrection of the dead—of the judgment which should ensue—and of the happiness of the good.—Jesus himself, as he had predicted, rose from the tomb; in his own person he gave an illustrious proof of the reality of the resurrection—he then ascended to heaven, as the first fruits of them that sleep—as the first-born of many brethren—as the Author of our salvation, and of that lively hope of an eternal inheritance which, from such illustrious evidence, we are encouraged to form.

As the confirmation of the Christian's hope is illustrious, so its object is, beyond all others, noble and sublime. This is no less than "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled,



“ defiled, and that fadeth not away.” As the original prepossessions in favour of a future state, as all the hopes of immortality and eternal glory were obscured, if not entirely lost, in the subjection of men’s passions and desires to the happiness of the present world, it was necessary, when the doctrine of a future state was revived and enforced, that the nature of it should be explained, and *that* in contradistinction to this mortal, corruptible and imperfect state. This we find expressly done in the words of the text, where we are informed that our future happiness shall be an inheritance, which shall be held, not by any mortal tenure or condition, nor shall it be subject to any precarious laws: the heavenly inheritance, when once entered upon, will be a secure possession—it will be retained without any dread of violence, without any desire of change, or fear of loss, it will be undefiled, as separate from all sin and moral depravity—no stain will rest upon the heavenly state—angelic purity will there obtain, and its happiness will be liable to no alarm. There our riches will never decay—our possessions never wax old

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—our pleasures never cloy—our transports never fatigue—our honours never diminish—our glory never fade—our felicity never run in the low tide of indifference, but be permanently full as the river of God, for ever and ever. Nor is this inheritance *now* depending upon any contingent circumstances, or any other conditions except holiness and purity, for it actually exists, and, as the apostle says, “is reserved in heaven.”

We are here naturally led to inquire for whom this inheritance is thus reserved, and what are the qualifications of those who are intitled to entertain this blessed hope. The text informs us that they are “those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” In whatever sense the power of God be here understood, it must ultimately be resolved into the divine energy, which, however it may operate, must act in a manner suitable to the constitution of our minds; and to this nothing can be more conformable than the rational means of religion which heaven has afforded us, in all respects accommodated to the conviction of the mind, and to the producing  
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correspondent actions in our lives. In Christianity are displayed all those perfections of God which best recommend him to our love and obedience; and all those coercive motives to duty, which, whether resulting from his justice, placability or grace, are, strictly speaking, derived from the power or energy of God. For which ever attribute of the divine nature gives life to virtue, this is the power by which it is produced. The divine energy can never be supposed to act independent of ourselves, or force us to be partakers of the heavenly calling whether we will or not. It cannot be efficacious except as it induces us to entertain a proper faith. It is "reserved for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation: (i. e.) *You* who are so convinced of the reality of the Christian religion, the authority of the Son of God, and the declarations of the Gospel, as shall produce such a firm reliance upon the divine veracity, such an unshaken hope of future happiness, that you will be led by it to practise all those virtues, and to comply with all those requisitions, which, by the terms of the Gospel, are

are made necessary and essential preparatives for the possession of eternal felicity.

We are informed in the text, that the salvation of Christians "is ready to be revealed "in the last time." This expression is used to denote the perfection of that scheme, or end of that dispensation to which it is applied; and therefore, in the present connection, it refers to the grand design of Providence, in the formation and redemption of man, and its completion in the future judgment, when the decisive sentence shall be passed upon all men, and rewards and punishments dispensed according to the strict rules of infinite justice and mercy, and in a manner conformable to the moral worth of mankind, when the whole scene of this world shall finally close upon the astonished sight of men. When this mighty theatre, upon which such various actions have been performed, and such incredible things achieved, shall, with all its magnificent decorations, be thrown into one general scene of confusion, where its grandeur shall perish, and the traces of man and all his acts remain no more on earth. Then one grand adjournment shall

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be made to the court of heaven, where the long account of numberless ages shall be settled—when the various dispensations of Providence shall be all unfolded—when impartial justice shall review the acts of mankind; and notwithstanding the seeming endless difficulties that rest on human affairs, yet all shall stand distinct and clear before the omniscient eye of that God to whom nothing can appear difficult, involved or perplexed, to whom there is no confusion; who sees distinctly through all events, who knows their connections, mutual dependences and results, and surveys their whole series from the beginning of time through all the countless ages of eternity.

At this awful period the Saviour of the world, to whom the Almighty Father has consigned its government, shall appear with full authority as its appointed Judge, with attending angels, and shall pass the sentence that shall determine the condition of all mankind. To some he will say, "Come, ye  
 "blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom  
 "prepared for you from the foundation of  
 "the world:" to others, "Depart from me,  
 "ye

“ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared  
 “for the devil and his angels.” Then shall  
 the happiness of the righteous be completed,  
 and the salvation of God be known to all  
 those who, by his power, through faith,  
 have been reserved for the participation of  
 immortal glory, and the possession of “an  
 “inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and  
 “that shall never fade away.”

There is this grand argument in favour of  
 our holy religion, that it presents to us the  
 only view of things which vindicates the  
 providence of God, and makes human na-  
 ture at all explicable and consistent.—With-  
 out a future state, man is an irresolvable  
 mystery, the whole plan of Providence re-  
 specting human affairs amazingly dark and  
 intricate, and we are involved in endless dif-  
 ficulties whenever we attempt to decypher  
 the design. When we see good and evil  
 promiscuously blended together, with all the  
 fluctuations of sublunary things, the mind is  
 pushed on in the inquiry after something fu-  
 ture, in order to account for, and solve the  
 present difficulties; at least it cannot avoid  
 indulging the hope that there will be a state,



correspondent in its refined and permanent happiness, to the enlarged desires of the human soul. It could never be the ultimate design of a wise and good Being, to raise this lower creation from nothing, to adorn this mighty scene with such beautiful decorations, displaying therein such resplendent glories of his own perfections, and furnishing out this goodly scene merely to behold the alternate joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, of the noblest beings that inhabit here:

It could not be the delight of an infinite and perfectly happy Being, to fix man to this sensible world, only to observe how variously his passions were excited and moved; by what uneasy varieties his breast was agitated and alarmed; and what sudden and contrary impressions may be made upon his easy passive senses, by the interchanging strokes and touches of different objects; how *this* moment he might be elevated into the ardour of hope, the transport of joy, and the ecstacy of pleasure; the next be depressed by despair, languish with sorrow, or be con-

vulsed with anguish. It would be strangely inconsistent with the acknowledged perfections of the Deity, to form such a creature as man, with all his powers and capacities; if this scene of being were to be the final close of all: and if when men had acted their several parts, one general oblivion were to confound the virtuous and the wicked, and man be forever shut out from existence. Nothing can be more inconceivable than that God should form a creature of such vast conceptions; endow him with a capacity of knowing and conversing with himself, give him some prospects of his own glory, and thereby raise boundless desires of exalted perfection and happiness, and yet defeat this grand design and blast all these glorious hopes. It is the observation of an ancient heathen author\*, that if with the  
 “ dissolution of the body, the soul, whatever  
 “ it may be, should be also dissolved, and  
 “ for ever cease to exist, it would be impos-  
 “ sible to account them blessed, who, never  
 “ having enjoyed any good as the reward

\* Dionysius Halicarnassensis.



“of their virtue, have even perished for  
“virtue itself.”

Take but into the system of man and the providence of God, a future state, and every difficulty is at once resolved, the darkest shades are all dispersed; life and immortality shew all things in bright colours, and cast a cheerful light over every object. When we consider this state, with all its trials, as preparatory to immortal glory, which is to be the grand design, the final result of all, the inquiry concerning evil is fruitless. All the afflictions of human life, though they may sometimes disturb, lose the power entirely to destroy the tranquillity of the soul. We acquire by this glorious prospect, confidence and faith in God, and thereby the hope of future blessedness; this will support us under all the trials of life, and render us superior to all that the world can either inflict or bestow. As the Gospel is that revelation by which we have these animating hopes confirmed, with what gratitude ought we to join in the ascription of praise to God contained in the words of our text. “Blessed be the  
“God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
“who,

“ who, according to his abundant mercy,  
 “ hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by  
 “ the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the  
 “ dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, un-  
 “ defiled, and that fadeth not away.”





who, according to his abundant mercy,  
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## S E R M O N XVII.

*So then after the Lord had spoken unto them  
he was received up into heaven, and sat on  
the right hand of God.* MARK xvi. 19.

“**M**Y Kingdom is not of this world”  
was the memorable answer made  
by Christ to Pilate to intimate to him the  
dignity of his nature and character as well  
as the innocence of his conduct. But the  
pomp to which that governor was accus-  
tomed and the state of extreme poverty and  
wretchedness in which our blessed Saviour  
then appeared prevented him from entering  
into the spirit of this reply, and forming a  
just idea of our Lord's intention in making  
it.

This great difference between the king-  
dom of the Messiah and those of this world  
commenced in a very remarkable manner  
with his appearance in human nature. At  
his birth, a manger was his cradle, and a  
stable



stable his presence-chamber, in which he was surrounded by a few poor shepherds, who, as directed by a vision of angels, attended to pay him homage. Trace him from thence through the course of his life and ministry, and you will find that, though really and in the sublimest sense a king, he veiled his glory from mortal eyes, and chose the laborious province of instructing the ignorant, and comforting the miserable. Follow him to the cross, and there you will find him put to death, not only as a malefactor, but as a slave, and most infamously marked out in this odious light, by being suspended between two thieves. From thence we trace him to the sepulchre, which was the last scene, and the lowest degree of his abasement. There it was that the glorious prospect of his royalty began to brighten, and to assume a very different appearance; as from thence he arose triumphant and immortal, overcoming death, and commencing that noble course of victory, the blessed effects of which run far beyond the limits of time, and extend to the endless ages of eternity. He was to receive from  
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his heavenly Father that sublime degree of majesty and power, which was the just and honourable reward of his sufferings. But in order to this it was necessary that he should leave this world the abode of sin and misery, and enter upon the possession of celestial glory and felicity.

Such in a general view was the glorious triumph of our blessed Lord, at the close of his ministerial labours; and it is worthy of observation that in this last scene, as much as in any of the foregoing, it was abundantly evident that "his kingdom was not of this world." Illustrious as his triumph was, it had nothing of worldly pomp or magnificence in it. It was plain and simple, yet amidst all that simplicity had the highest marks of grandeur and majesty. For when he was about to return to his heavenly Father our Evangelist tells us that "he brought out his disciples to Bethany, and (there it is said) he lift up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven: and (as St. Mark adds in his account) sat down at the right hand of God."

Such



Such is the relation of this memorable fact, upon which I shall endeavour, in humble dependence on the divine blessing,

Ist. To make some cursory remarks, and

IIdly. To consider some important points arising from it.

With respect to the remarks to be made upon it, it may be proper to observe in the general,

That this important transaction in the history of our blessed Lord is related in a very concise, plain and simple style. Such indeed is the style of the evangelists on all occasions, but it seems to be more than usually so on this. It is probable that any other writers but themselves would have given us a very pompous and magnificent account of this event, especially as it was not only miraculous, but miraculous in the highest degree imaginable. It was a case of which the divine power had never granted more than three instances, corresponding to as many remarkable periods in the history of the Church. The first was long before the Law, and in the most early ages of the world, when Enoch, as a reward for his

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distinguished piety and holiness, was translated to heaven without seeing death. Many ages after that, and long after the giving of the law, Elijah ascended in a visible manner with the same exemption from the grave that Enoch had before been favoured with. These may be considered as types of our blessed Lord, who furnished the third and last instance of this kind, and an instance much more important than either of the foregoing, by reason of that peculiar interest which Christians have in it, and in all those salutary effects of his divine mission which flow from it. St. Luke, you see, relates it in a few words; "he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." This is certainly one valuable mark of a sincere and faithful historian, the excellence of whose history consists in the fidelity of his narration rather than in the artificial ornaments of his language. They leave such gaudy trappings to those who devote their pens to the cause of imposture and deceit, by which to impose upon the world with false accounts. Such need all the arts of eloquence to supply the place of truth, and

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to compensate for the puerility of the subject by the artful graces of style and the laboured beauties of narration. But an Evangelist, whose pen was consecrated solely to the interests of truth, needed not any of those fallacious aids, and therefore disdained to borrow them. It is sufficient for writers of their class to give a plain short account of the fact as it happened. Such a method, in the opinion of all good judges, strengthens their testimony, and adds considerable weight to their account. It certainly does so in the present case, and is a circumstance that ought in all reason to recommend to our cordial attention the subject under consideration, upon which permit me to remark

1st. That this event took place in a manner so striking as must leave a very deep and lasting impression on the minds of the disciples. It was in the presence of *all the Apostles*. It was not necessary that they should see him rise from the dead, because his appearing to them and frequently conversing with them at intervals during forty days after that event, was an indisputable proof that he was actually risen. But as they could  
not

not possibly behold him in heaven while they remained upon earth, it was absolutely necessary that they should see him ascend thither that they might be able to declare it with the utmost certainty. It therefore seemed good to him to have them all present as eye-witnesses of this grand fact, that by their number and the unanimity of their testimony, they might be qualified to gain greater credit in the future discharge of their ministry.

2dly. It may also be observed, that St. Luke is here very particular in his account of the place from which our Lord ascended. It was part of the Mount of Olives in the district of Bethany, and at no great distance from that town. It was near the Mount of Olives that our Lord passed that doleful night in which he was betrayed, and therefore it is probable that he brought his apostles thither on this occasion, that near the same place where they had been eye-witnesses of his bitter distress, they might now behold his glory.

When he had assembled them on the spot on which he intended to take his leave of them,



them, as a last mark of his affectionate and tender regard he lifted up his hands and blessed them. In their Master the disciples had a most affectionate friend, who would not take his leave of them, without presenting to God those powerful prayers and supplications, that might recommend them to the divine blessing, and serve to strengthen their faith, hope and confidence amidst all the difficulties of their approaching conflicts. And no sooner had he done this, than they beheld him rising gradually from earth towards heaven; clothed with the ancient *schekinah* or glory of God in the form of a bright cloud; while they followed his ascent with their eyes, till, by the lengthening distance he became invisible. St. Mark adds that "he sat down at the right hand of God." Scarcely any one can be ignorant that this expression is not to be understood literally, because God, being a pure Spirit, hath neither body nor parts of a body; and consequently every one must be sensible that it is only a strong and beautiful figure of speech to express the highest degree of honour. It is an allusion to an ancient custom  
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of the Jewish princes, who, on public occasions of particular pomp and solemnity, used to place their principal favourites on the right hand of the throne, a mark of respect which Solomon, we are told, paid to his mother. It is therefore an expression well adapted to signify the authority with which Christ, in his human nature, is invested, and that high degree of glory with which he is crowned in heaven, beyond the most exalted angels, who are all subject to him, and denotes that he is the peculiar favourite of his heavenly Father and the great Mediator and Head of the united kingdoms of grace and glory. This he merited by his sufferings and received as the reward of them. For as the Apostle tells us (Phil. ii. 9.), "Because he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; therefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee might bow of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that he is Lord to the glory

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“ of God the Father.” And we are also informed by the same apostle (Ephes. i. 20, 21.) “ that God raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church.” Thus it was that Christ “ after having suffered, entered into glory,” that “ as a prince and a Saviour he might give repentance and remission of sins,” and might return in due time to raise the dead, to judge the world, and “ to give to every one according to his works.”

Thus much may serve for the remarks upon this important fact as recorded by St. Luke and the other Evangelists. We shall now proceed to what was further proposed which was

Idly. To consider some circumstances connected with and arising from this memorable event.

And here we are naturally led to reflect on

on the certainty of Christ's ascension—its necessity—and its consequences.

1st. With respect to the certainty and reality of Christ's ascension, it is proved by all those arguments that serve to establish the truth of the New Testament history. But as a more enlarged detail of these may be of service to establish our faith on a yet broader basis, it may not be amiss to have recourse to a more particular demonstration. One considerable proof of the reality of this great event arises from the subsequent ministry of the apostles: they were left by their master at Jerusalem, where he expressly commanded them to remain till they received the Holy Spirit, and where they were exposed to all the fury of their enemies, whose malice they continually felt, and by whom they were most severely persecuted: yet none of these things could induce them to waver in their testimony concerning the truth of the resurrection and ascension of their Lord, or prevail upon them to desist from asserting these great facts repeatedly, openly and boldly. They insisted upon them before all the people, in the face of the Jew-



ish council when brought before it, and resolutely adhered to their assertions when confined in prison and under the scourge of persecution.

The first feast of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection, afforded another remarkable proof of his ascension on high. It was then that, in consequence of the visible and miraculous effusion of the Spirit upon them, which their master had expressly promised as the effect and pledge of his being returned to his heavenly Father, the apostles became as it were new men, were enlightened with more just and enlarged views of the Gospel, and by the gift of tongues were qualified to preach it to all nations.

Moreover, the present existence of the Christian Church in the world, and consequently we ourselves as a part of it, may be considered as another proof of the reality of this event. We may go back, as led by sacred and profane history, through all the past ages of the Church, and trace it up to that period when it consisted of no more than an hundred and twenty persons, assembled in a private chamber from fear of the

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the Jews, as we learn from Acts i. 15.—It is from this small beginning that we may derive the origin of that Gospel which made many of the Jews renounce their ceremonials, turned the Gentiles from their dumb idols, and the men of the world from their carnal prejudices and pursuits, to embrace the doctrine of Christ and him crucified. All these wonderful conquests were achieved by the ministry of twelve fishermen without any worldly protection, any friends, any credit, any considerable talents either natural or acquired. It was by these comparatively mean instruments that divine grace changed the face of the moral world in a most surprising manner, “turned sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and Satan unto God,” disposed them to look for salvation through one who was crucified; to glory in him as their Lord and Saviour, and readily to part with all things, not excepting life itself, for his sake. It was by virtue of the power of Christ, as ascended into heaven and seated on the right hand of God, that the success of the Gospel, notwithstanding all the violent opposition it



had to encounter, was so rapid and extensive; and under the influence of the same divine energy, though in a degree and manner less conspicuous than at that period, has it been continued from that to the present time, and extended far and wide. To this it is owing that we, who were originally sinners of the Gentiles, are permitted to partake of its various blessings, as the disciples of the Saviour, and members of that Church which was at first so remarkably introduced into the world, and has ever since been so wonderfully sustained in it. So that in this connection of circumstances, the existence of the Christian Church upon earth, and we ourselves as members of it, constitutes one proof among others of our blessed Lord's exaltation to glory, since had this not actually taken place, his cause and interest must have perished in its very birth, and the knowledge of him would never have reached us.—Such was the decision of a Doctor of the Jewish law, in the midst of an assembly convened for the purpose of deliberating on the means most proper to crush this rising sect, as we learn from Acts v. 38. “ If this  
“ counsel

“counsel, or this work be of men, it will  
“come to nought.”

We shall now consider the necessity of Christ's ascension and exaltation, which will appear of the utmost importance if we reflect that the dignity, splendour and truth of his mission rested upon his entrance into that glory for which his sufferings were only preparatory, and in which terminated all the ancient prophecies. It confirms all those grand titles ascribed to him by the prophets, which, had his exaltation never taken place, would have been dark and inexplicable. This fact was also necessary to open a fountain of consolation to all the truly penitent; it marks him out as “the Author of eternal  
“salvation to all that obey him;” shews that his atonement was accepted, that his mediation was successful, and that as he died for our sins, so he arose from the dead and ascended into heaven for our justification. It contains therefore a comfortable assurance to all the truly penitent, that the full remission of all their sins shall be imparted to them through him, that heaven is opened for them, that he is gone thither “to prepare a



" place for them," that he will succour them  
 while they remain here with all needful com-  
 fort, will preserve them from falling, and  
 " will come again and receive them to him-  
 self," and at length " present them spotless  
 before the presence of his glory with ex-  
 ceeding joy." And let us now inquire in-  
 to the fruits and effects of this grand event.  
 The first of these was an ample qualification  
 of his apostles to preach the Gospel every-  
 where by virtue of the gift of tongues and  
 other miraculous powers conferred upon  
 them by their exalted Lord. To this mira-  
 cle we are likewise to attribute the rapid suc-  
 cess of the Gospel in the world, and its tri-  
 umph over all the opposition made against  
 it. It also made way for his efficacious in-  
 tercession in behalf of all his faithful follow-  
 ers at the throne of grace, in which the  
 apostle thus triumphs and leads them to tri-  
 umph: " Who shall lay any thing to the  
 charge of God's elect? It is God that  
 justifieth: who is he that condemneth?  
 It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is  
 risen again, who is even at the right hand  
 of God, who also maketh intercession for  
 us."

"us." St. John in effect declares the same,  
 when he says "if any man sin we have an  
 "advocate with the Father even Jesus Christ  
 "the righteous." It is also to Christ's ascen-  
 sion that we are taught by the apostle to  
 attribute the institution of the Gospel minis-  
 try, and its success in all ages of the Church  
 and world: For it was when "he ascended  
 "up on high that he gave gifts unto men,  
 "constituting some apostles, and some pro-  
 "phets, and some evangelists, and some pas-  
 "tors and teachers, for the perfecting of the  
 "saints, for the work of the ministry, for  
 "the edifying of the body of Christ." It is  
 also with an immediate reference to this im-  
 portant fact that the apostle calls upon  
 Christians to have their conversation in hea-  
 ven, from whence they expect the second  
 and triumphant appearance of their Saviour;  
 and in the 3d Chapter of Colossians, St. Paul  
 urges it as a powerful motive to evangelical  
 morality in its fullest sense and most ample  
 extent. "If ye then (saith he) be risen with  
 "Christ, seek those things that are above,  
 "where Christ sitteth at the right hand of  
 "God,—Set your affections on things above,  
 "and



“ and not on things on the earth ; for ye are  
 “ dead, and your life is hid with Christ in  
 “ God. When Christ who is our life shall  
 “ appear, then shall ye also appear with him  
 “ in glory. Mortify therefore your members  
 “ which are upon the earth.” Such is the  
 application which he makes at large of our  
 Lord’s ascension, and goes on, through the  
 remainder of the chapter, to enforce the re-  
 gular cheerful discharge of various duties,  
 both personal and social, to which this grand  
 event, if properly attended to, supplies a  
 powerful motive, and constitutes an unde-  
 niable obligation.

Let us then bring home to our own  
 hearts the great truths we have been review-  
 ing. Let us enter into ourselves and com-  
 pare our ruling tempers, practices and ha-  
 bits with those good and holy dispositions  
 that are necessary to form the life and con-  
 duct of a citizen of heaven. If, upon this  
 examination, we find in our tempers and  
 conduct any resemblance with that of Jesus  
 Christ, we may then conclude, without fear  
 of deceiving ourselves, that we are interest-  
 ed in that salvation which he is gone to pre-  
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pare for all such, under the encouraging relation of their forerunner. We may then conclude that we are the children of God in the bond of that everlasting covenant of grace which is ratified by the blood of the Redeemer, and is in all things well ordered and sure. And if children in this exalted sense, we are taught by the apostle to look upon ourselves as heirs of an immortal possession, "as heirs of God and joint heirs "with Jesus Christ." If this be our state we have an inward witness of our being justified and accepted of God. We have then in our hearts the effect of that encouraging promise of our blessed Redeemer, "If a man "love me, he will keep my words, and my "Father will love him, and we will come "and make our abode with him." We are then in a moral sense, risen with Christ, and have in ourselves a delightful earnest of that future glory in heavenly places, in which, with all the redeemed, we shall dwell together in the presence, and under the immediate and visible dominion of Jesus Christ.

Views like these ought to impress us with a due sense of the grandeur of our christian calling,



calling, and of that immortal hope, in the possession of which it terminates. If these just sentiments are predominant in our hearts they will prevent our being slothful in our great business, and will render us fervent in spirit while serving the Lord, and of consequence steadfast and unmoveable in the honorable work he hath assigned us as being firmly persuaded that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. As the work is laborious, the motive is proportionably strong. For what, if duly considered, can have more energy to animate and quicken us than that immortal crown of righteousness, which is reserved for all them who love the appearance of our Lord? What object more encouraging than Jesus sitting at the right hand of God? from whence he calls to us by his precepts, his promises and his example, to follow him, and assures us that, where he now is we at length shall also be. To him then, as speaking from his heavenly throne, let us humbly and thankfully attend. If we do not, we have no good evidence that we are his faithful followers, but are only nominal christians, who while we have a name to live

live are in reality dead, and therefore remain without any solid hopes from his exaltation to glory. Let those, whose character this is, take the alarm, that from a conviction of their guilt and danger they may fly to him as the only appointed refuge from the divine displeasure, and take shelter in that rich, that free and saving grace of God which is manifested and offered by him.

May this be our happy character and situation, that we may obtain the best direction through life, the most solid comfort in affliction, the sweetest enjoyment of whatever prosperity Providence may confer upon us, and the most valuable support in the hour of death. Then will the exaltation of our blessed Lord to the right hand of his Father be matter of well-founded joy and triumph to us. And when we have finished our course here, we shall have the happiness to be ranked with the spirits of just men made perfect, and be for ever fixed in his immediate presence, not only to *behold* the glory which the Father hath given him, but also, in our measure, to partake of it. Which God of his infinite mercy grant through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SER-





## S E R M O N XVIII.

*Let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also. JOHN xiv. 1, 2, 3.*

**N**O character has a more powerful claim to our love and esteem than that which is distinguished by compassion; and among all those to whom the amiable title of compassionate has been ascribed, no one was ever more eminent than our Lord Jesus Christ. This assertion might easily be proved and illustrated by a variety of remarkable instances recorded in the Gospels, of his pity for the multitude; his tender sorrow for his friend Lazarus; and sympathy with his surviving sisters; his weeping over Jeru-



Jerusalem, and praying for his murderers with his expiring breath ; but upon these I forbear to insist, because the words of our text, as well as the whole transaction that precedes and follows them, are very remarkable proofs of this point. They are well calculated to engage our most serious attention, from the dignity of the speaker, the character and situation of those to whom they were addressed, and from the solemn and interesting occasion upon which they were delivered. Our blessed Lord had frequently foretold his approaching death ; but his disciples seem not to have understood him, or at least not to have been fully convinced of it till at the celebration of the last passover, wherein he assured them that this awful event was at hand, and spoke of it in such a manner as precluded all possibility of doubt or mistake concerning his meaning. Then were all their expectations frustrated, their prejudices excited, and their hopes blasted ; they were filled with consternation, grief and despair. The ample experience they had of the wisdom of his instructions, the power of his miracles and the charms of his

his goodness, only served to produce in their hearts a violent struggle between the esteem and affection they had conceived for him, and the mortification and disappointment of seeing him apprehended and put to death like a miserable malefactor, instead of raising himself and them to honour and grandeur. Amidst this sorrowful and dejected state, this discourse was well adapted to support and comfort them; every expression in it was directed to their inmost thoughts and affections, and it is throughout full of an inimitable dignity of sentiment, simplicity of manners, kindness of disposition, and propriety of address. His view was to strengthen their faith, to mitigate their grief and to revive their hopes. He displayed the most affectionate regard for their present comfort as well as for their future happiness, and with the wisest precepts and directions, intermingles such lenient consolations and encouraging promises, that none of the ancient writers, whether philosophers, historians or poets, can furnish out so beautiful a scene of friendship as is delineated in this parting interview between Christ and his disciples.



What can be imagined more affecting, or more consolatory than the manner in which our blessed Lord introduces this address? "Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." As from the evidence of his works which you see, you believe in an invisible God, so let the miracles you have seen me perform engage you to confide in me, though I am now going to depart from you, and to be for a time invisible; let not therefore my sufferings and death plunge you into despair, as if I were about to perish entirely, or to be separated from you for ever, or as if my pretensions to the character of the Messiah, and your hopes of my rising to power and glory, and becoming your Prince and Deliverer were defeated. This world is not the only scene of existence and life, or of honour and power. In the universe of God's creation  
there

there are numberless different worlds and places of residence, and death will be to me only a passage into another state, where I shall have an opportunity of employing my care and power for the greater advantage of my disciples; and the intent of my leaving you at present and going into that other state, is to prepare for your reception there, after which I will come again and translate you into it, that you may dwell together with me for ever. In this manner did the departing Saviour cheer his desponding disciples, enlarging their understanding, confirming their belief and reviving their hopes.

It is a character peculiar to our Lord's discourses, that he expresses the fullest sense and the most sublime sentiments with the greatest simplicity and familiarity of language. The apostles, when speaking of a future state, use the most pompous expressions: they seem to be overwhelmed with the greatness and dazzled with the lustre of the subject; whereas Christ mentions it with the most familiar simplicity, as a Prince who had been educated in a splendid court would speak with the utmost ease of many magnifi-



cent things in it, the view of which would astonish and confound those who were unaccustomed to them. As with the utmost justice and propriety he styles the supreme Being, Father, so he here calls the universe the house of his Father, in which he says there are many mansions, various scenes and places of residence for his different creatures. —

Confined as we are to the surface of the earth, limited by imperfect organs of sense and a narrow sphere of existence, we can see and know but little of the boundless works of the almighty Creator. What knowledge the most minute insect, confined to its little cell, has of the whole earth, and of all the tribes of men and other animals, such, in proportion, is our knowledge of the surrounding system of the universe.

But as we see the earth replenished with numberless animals of various forms, and placed in different states and conditions; as we see a regular gradation in the various species of creatures, from the lowest insect to the highest of mankind, so it is reasonable to believe that all the living creatures which inhabit

inhabit the earth bear but a small proportion in number to the living inhabitants of the universe in general; that, as mankind are raised in capacity, dignity and enjoyment, above the lower animals, there are also creatures of ranks and orders ascending above us in endless gradation: and as this earth is the appointed residence and habitation of mankind, so there are innumerable other worlds and regions infinitely various, each possessed by, and replenished with its own proper inhabitants. The discoveries made in natural philosophy extend so far as to ascertain that there are several material worlds situated within the reach of the human eye, which have so great an affinity to the world we inhabit as to afford the strongest presumption that they are in like manner filled with their own proper and living inhabitants, who like ourselves derive support and benefit from the light and heat of the sun. If then our own system be of this nature and extent, it is probable that in immeasurable space there are numberless systems or states of being, which neither are nor can be subject to any of our senses, and



of which it is impossible for us at present to form any idea.

As a man blind from his birth cannot form the least conception of light and colours, and is brought into a new and higher state and capacity of action and enjoyment when the sense of seeing is given him, so the almighty power of God may give to other creatures faculties of which we have not the least idea; or may translate them into a new and higher state of existence, and impart to them powers and means of enjoyment and happiness, of which in their former state they could not form any notion. But we may with the greatest probability conclude, that every species and order of beings throughout the universe possess mansions, spheres of activity, objects and means of happiness suitable to their respective natures and qualities.

With regard to ourselves and the whole human species, it is not to be presumed that we can comprehend all the various ends and wise purposes which the Almighty had in view in the formation of mankind. We cannot therefore judge with certainty from  
reason

reason alone, what is his design with regard to our duration, nor absolutely determine that most important question, whether mankind are totally destroyed at death, or whether they shall survive that change, and pass into another state. But supposing we should form a hope that, in general, death does not put an end to our existence, and that we shall pass into some other state, yet how many doubts, how many difficulties still remain unresolved by any arguments that human reason can produce! If the light of nature does afford some glimmering hopes, some dubious intimations and presages of a future state, yet how blank is the prospect! What shadows, clouds and darkness rest upon it, impenetrable to human eyes, and beyond the reach of our most curious researches.

But is it not natural to extend our inquiries further? Can we help being solicitous to know whether there be any place prepared to receive us after death? Any particular regions, any habitations or mansions appointed to us in the universe? When our souls launch into the boundless ocean of unknown being, shall they wander solitary and



forlorn through the abyfs of immenſity and eternity—or who ſhall be our pilot and conductor? For whoſe friendly guidance and protection may we hope? In whoſe territories ſhall we arrive? To whoſe government and juřiſdiction ſhall we be ſubject? With what ſociety ſhall we claim acquaintance? Or muſt we be loſt in the deſerts of creation, having no place of refuge, no home or habitation, no friends, no Saviour, Protector and Governor?

All theſe intereſting queſtions, which the light of nature cannot reſolve, are fully answered by our bleſſed Lord in the words of our text, where he aſſures all his obedient followers, that in his Father's houſe are many manſions; that he left this world to prepare a place for them; that he would come again and receive them to himſelf, that where he is they may be alſo.

In this world, though we owe every thing ultimately to God, yet we receive nothing immediately from him. We are born and live by the mediation and aſſiſtance of others; the care and inſtruction, the benevolence and good will of parents and friends, are the

the instruments by which the Almighty imparts all our safety, support and enjoyment. Thus the Gospel revelation coincides with what we see and know of the divine conduct and designs, and confirms the natural deduction, that something of a similar œconomy and dispensation will take place in a future world; that our resurrection after death, our safety or salvation in a future state, our mansion or place of residence, our manner of life, our enjoyment and felicities, and every thing relative to our well-being, will be under the care, direction and government, not immediately of the supreme Being, but of some subordinate agent or minister.—The whole constitution of things in this world leads us to apprehend that if mankind are to live after death, and God has appointed a world to come for them, there is some Mediator between God and man, some Deliverer, Protector and Governor, to whose immediate care and tuition mankind are committed, as the distinguished friend and patron of the human race, by whose powerful agency and wise direction, all things relative to their future and eternal  
state



state shall be transacted and accomplished.

In this view the Christian revelation is a beautiful comment upon the religion of nature. It informs us that our Lord Jesus Christ has received power and commission from God to deliver us from the dominion of death, to afford us protection and safety, and to provide mansions for us after we have quitted these earthly tabernacles. He is our resurrection and our life, and our future state is under his government and inspection. That we might trust in him, and rely on his care and protection, even in the article of death, God raised him from the dead, and in reward of his exemplary and most perfect obedience, hath invested him with universal power, committed to him the keys of the invisible world, and constituted him Judge over mankind.

The idea of an intermediate power between the one supreme and infinite Being, and his frail imperfect creatures; a power friendly and benevolent to the human race; a person who has experienced the innocent infirmities of our nature, and exhibited eve-

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ry human virtue, who has himself passed before us through the dark valley of the shadow of death, whose peculiar charge and province, whose most affectionate concern and important enterprize is the salvation of mankind, must at once appear highly philosophical to the reflecting mind, and surely be most grateful to the human heart: nor can any thing be more consonant to our amplest views of the universe than this faith of the Gospel.

It is philosophical because analogous to the established order of things, as the power of the Almighty does not produce the glorious light of day but by the operation of the sun; as his unerring wisdom does not bring mankind into the world but by the intervention of man; as his infinite goodness does not bestow any blessings of this life but by intermediate benefactors: so neither will divine power, wisdom and goodness raise mankind from the dead, to the life and happiness of a world to come, but by the beneficent operation of an intermediate power; of him, who is revealed to us as the great benefactor and Saviour of men, the author  
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of a future state, the resurrection and the life to the world of mankind.

Nor is it less adapted to administer consolation to feeble mortals. When we consider the mysterious and momentous nature of that change which will befall us at death, when we are separated from every present object, deserted of every human acquaintance, and no earthly power can befriend or relieve us, what can afford us so much consolation, such cheering hopes, as the belief that our souls shall not wander desolate, friendless and forsaken in a chaos of solitary existence, but that there is a place prepared, a society ready to receive, and a propitious power appointed to protect us, to order our state and assign our habitation; a kingdom subject to the government of a potentate most friendly to mankind, who will give to all the virtuous an hospitable and kind reception to his celestial dominions; a potentate whose government was erected for the very end and purpose of saving mankind and providing seats of happiness for the spirits of the good; that amidst the vast variety of states and worlds in the universe there

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is one designed for the perpetual inheritance of good men, and prepared for their reception by the care and agency of our blessed Saviour, whose high imperial office it is to raise mankind from the dead, to judge them, and to put the virtuous in possession of this everlasting kingdom.

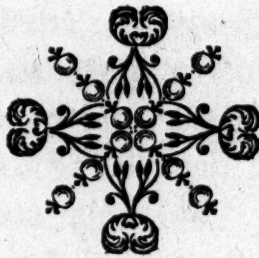
The great end of all the actions and sufferings of our Lord, of all his procedure and undertaking, was that he might become the author of this immortal happiness to good men; that he might obtain this celestial province; that he might establish this intimate indissoluble connection between himself and the world of mankind; when all the virtuous, the sons of the resurrection shall be formed into one vast community, the object of his eternal care and love, as he will be the object of their admiration, esteem, gratitude and obedience to everlasting ages. Then will they also resemble and be allied to those orders of superior beings, who are now spectators of human affairs, and be united with them under Christ their exalted head, in that region, or mansion, where his everlasting throne is fixed; where  
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he shines with ineffable glory, and will for ever employ his wisdom and power for the happiness of his subjects, by him redeemed from sin and death, and clothed with immortality.

Having these sublime truths revealed to us, it becomes us surely to set our affections upon things above where Christ sitteth invested with honour and dominion, knowing that when he who is our life shall appear, his followers shall appear with him in glory. By this hope we ought to be animated to follow his example of humility, resignation, patience, obedience to God, and benevolence to men. By thus dying to sin and living to righteousness in this world, we shall have an entrance administered to us into his everlasting kingdom. And in consequence of this christian faith and obedience, we need not let our hearts be troubled by the prospect of our own death, nor be sorrowful for that of our friends as if we had no hope, but may enjoy solid consolation amidst all the afflictions of mortality, and may at last with calm and serene confidence resign our departing spirits to the merciful disposal of

of our Saviour, in the blessed hope of an admission into that happy state where he resides, and of being "for ever with the Lord."



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1875

of our nation in the United States of America  
and the people of the United States of America  
are hereby notified that the following is the  
list of the names of the persons who have  
been appointed to the office of the  
Secretary of the United States of America  
for the year 1875.



1875

## S E R M O N XIX.

*Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.*

· PROVERBS iv. 7.

**I**F we look into the short history which Moses gives of our first parents, we find, that one of the arts employed by the great enemy of mankind, to corrupt their innocence, was to misrepresent the commands of God, and to insinuate that they were severe and unreasonable. “Yea hath God  
“said, ye shall not eat of every tree in the  
“garden?” was the ensnaring question which the tempter proposed to Eve, well knowing that if he could persuade her to think the command harsh or unnecessary, it would not be difficult to induce her to violate an injunction, which she must then regard with discontent and aversion. But whatever misrepresentations of the divine laws may have been caused by the malevo-

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lent designs of the wicked, or by the erroneous notions and superstitious follies of good though weak persons, nothing can be more certain than that the commandments of God are not grievous. They are all just and rational in themselves, and enjoined on us in mercy ; a sincere obedience to them being the only means of attaining that happiness which alone is worthy of our nature and consistent with the great end of our existence.

When therefore any thing is proposed to us as of divine authority, we not only have a right, but it becomes our duty to inquire whether in itself it be fit and reasonable, for we may rest assured, that from a being of infinite wisdom, justice and goodness, nothing can proceed which is not perfectly rational in its foundation, fit and necessary in its obligation, as well as merciful in its end and design.

As a proof of this our blessed Lord never enjoins any thing on his followers as essentially necessary, without adding some cogent argument, which may convince them that their obedience is reasonable in itself, and  
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conducive to their real welfare, and true interest.

A remarkable instance of this occurs in the conversation which passed between our Lord and the two sisters of Lazarus during his entertainment at their house. After mildly reproving the too anxious assiduity of Martha, he recommends a care to work out our salvation as "the one thing needful," and assigns, as a reason for this injunction, that "it is a good part which shall not be taken away," or in other words, that religion and virtue constitute the sovereign good of man, which should be the grand object of his pursuit, because the source of his supreme and ultimate felicity.

In treating the words before us it is scarcely necessary to observe that the wisdom, which is here spoken of as our most valuable acquisition, consists in such views of God, and of ourselves, as shall lead to the wisest and best improvement of our being here, and will terminate in the utmost happiness of which it is capable hereafter.

An ingenious philosophical writer \* has

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justly observed, that in order to give any object a real claim to the title of our sovereign good it is necessary that it should be—agreeable to our nature—conducive to our well-being—suitable to all times, places and circumstances of life—durable—and inamissible.

Nothing can render man truly happy which is not agreeable to his nature and consistent with the grand design of his existence. Within a certain degree many of the innocent pleasures of life claim this property, and, when enjoyed within such limits, it is readily acknowledged, that they are grateful to the senses, that they exhilarate the spirits, and by unbending the mind invigorate the faculties, and qualify them for nobler pursuits. Within these bounds only can they be desirable, for when pursued beyond them, they become enervating, destructive, and the transient satisfaction they may confer is mingled with satiety and disgust, and followed with sorrow and remorse.

Though degenerated from his original purity, and labouring under many moral imper-

perfections, man is not a being so totally degraded as some Divines have thought fit to represent him. Though passion may frequently place objects in a wrong light, and by obscuring or perverting his faculties, lead him into error and vice; yet when these causes exert not their baneful influence, the genuine bias of his soul is on the side of virtue, and he immediately determines in favour of what is reasonable, just and fit. And is not this a proof that whatever is so agreeable to the perfection of our nature, whatever diminution this perfection may have suffered by accidental causes?

Will any one presume to deny that it is reasonable, just and fit, or in other words, agreeable to our nature, to cultivate gratitude and love towards our best benefactor? veneration and submission towards our creator and supreme protector? Is it not natural to avoid what will draw upon us the displeasure of a Being of infinite power, and to pursue what will secure to us the approbation and friendship of a Being of infinite wisdom and goodness?—To imitate the moral attributes of Him whom we think the stan-



dard of perfection, to love his creatures because he loves them, to be just because he is just, to be benevolent and merciful because he is the fountain of mercy, and to confine our temporal pursuits within such limits that they may not be injurious to our fellow-creatures, because their general good is the grand design of the Deity?—All this is, and must be, fit and natural. And is not this the sum of our duty? Are not these the sentiments and precepts of religion? “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is right; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

In all temporal and worldly pursuits, the object, when attained, affords not that satisfaction to the mind which we had fondly hoped to derive from it. The most exalted condition has its abasements, the happiest conjuncture of fortune leaves many wishes behind, and after the highest gratifications of sense, the mind is still carried forward in the endless pursuit of new objects. The reason of this is obvious, because none of these objects are equal to the faculties and capacity

capacity of man, or consistent with the great ends of his existence. None are sent into the world merely to enjoy temporal splendours, riches or pleasures. Whoever therefore limits his pursuit to these will experience that he has laboured for what can never fully reward him when attained, and after all his care to cultivate the object of his hopes, will reap the painful harvest of disappointment and disgust.

Widely different are the effects of moral good which is the object of religion. The contemplation of an infinite Being, the study of his astonishing works and dispensations, are objects which will afford unceasing employment and satisfaction for the most exalted faculties of the sublimest genius. The constant progressive improvement of the soul in virtue and happiness, and the continual approaches to the perfection of its nature, are ends worthy the existence not only of man, but even of the highest angel. Whatever attainments are made in these pursuits afford full gratification without satiety: and small as are our acquisitions of this kind in the present life, yet the beauty and gran-



deur of the objects will charm the soul and inspire new ardour to advance with cheerful steps from knowledge to knowledge, from virtue to virtue.

Another condition requisite to constitute the sovereign good is, that it be conducive to our well being.

Few are so limited in their desires as to be contented with the mere consciousness of existence, without aspiring to some object which may be productive of happiness. With these views different persons strike into various paths as inclination and opportunity may lead them. Some wander through the flowery walks of pleasure, some tread the thorny ways that lead to wealth, and others climb the dangerous steep of ambition, while each imagines that he shall find happiness in the road he has selected. But a little reflection will easily convince us that none of these objects are necessarily conducive to our true felicity. Even of innocent pleasures, which are dependent on religion and virtue, it may be said, that when pursued beyond a certain degree they defeat their own end, and become insipid and sometimes highly detrimental

tal to our welfare. That neither wealth nor power necessarily contribute to our well-being, is evident from experience, since many have lived happy without them, while others have been miserable even when possessing them in the highest degree.

Happiness is not made up of transient raptures and momentary gleams of delight, which, like rapid torrents, while they strike the spectator with admiration, exhaust themselves, and leave the surrounding landscape parched and barren. It consists in the enjoyment of permanent serenity and calm satisfaction; like the smoothly gliding river, ever deep and full, though placid and silent, it administers constant and equal beauty and fertility to its cheerful banks.

Of such felicity what can afford a fairer prospect than a virtuous and religious disposition? This tends to preserve the desires and passions within due subjection, to prevent them from inflaming the imagination and biasing the judgment. Such a disposition enables us to view objects in their true and proper colours, unadorned with fictitious and delusive attractions, and leaves



us free to choose or to reject as becomes reasonable creatures. The exercise of each particular virtue adds vigour to the soul, and preserves it from those disorders which disturb its repose and destroy its felicity ; while their combined effects, heightened and animated by the sentiments and principles of religion, elevate and ennoble human nature, render it superior to the accidents and evils of life, and susceptible of the pleasures and enjoyments of a more perfect state of being. The true Christian's views of God, whom he considers as the Parent of mankind using every method to bring his children to the perfection of virtue and happiness, will diffuse over his soul an uninterrupted serenity, and render his duty a pleasure. No evils will be able to discompose his mind, and to him afflictions will appear no more than trials of his patience, fortitude, faith and resignation, necessary to advance him towards a state of moral perfection. Confiding in his just and rational ideas of the Deity, and trusting in the promises revealed in the divine word, he can never suspect that his true happiness is neglected in this world, or that  
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his sincere endeavours to approve himself to his Maker, will miss their reward of glory, honour and immortality in the world to come.

3. The third quality requisite to constitute the sovereign good is, that it should be suitable to all times, places and conditions of life.

Let temporal objects be examined by this criterion, and we shall find that they are limited to particular seasons, and can be enjoyed only in certain circumstances of life. To derive satisfaction from them, some proportion of wealth and prosperity, of health and vigour, of animal spirits and mental accomplishments is absolutely requisite. Whatever pleasure they may confer in some situations, they are but ill adapted to the obscurity of poverty, or the distresses of want. However they may delight in the moment of health and cheerfulness, they fail us in the hour of dejection and sorrow, on the bed of pain and sickness, in the near view and apprehension of death. They possess not power to dissipate the gloom of adversity, to raise the languid head, to soothe  
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the troubled conscience, or to support the soul amidst the terrors of dissolving nature. But the satisfactions arising from the principles of religion and the practice of virtue are unconfined, and extend their kindly influence to every time, place and circumstance of life: they are the ornament of youth and the comfort of age; they embellish prosperity, and afford refuge and consolation in adversity. More benignant than the soothing opiate, they diffuse a complacent quietude amidst the pains of sickness. Even when flesh and heart fail, when the world, with all its attractions, can no longer amuse, when friends, with all their kind assiduity, can only drop the unavailing tear, then will the consolations of religion and virtue still support us, and shed beams of comfort and hope to dispel the dreary shades of the dark vale of death.

A fourth condition implied in our idea of the sovereign good is, that it should be durable and inamissible.

If we survey the several objects which awaken our desires and animate our pursuits respecting this world, we find that, like  
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paintings, they owe many of their attractions to the particular point in which they are seen by the beholder. Place them in a different light, or view them from a different situation, and instead of the delightful scene they before exhibited, they present a disorderly confusion of colours, a shapeless mass of unmeaning deformity. What is thus dependent on contingent circumstances cannot be otherwise than uncertain and insecure. Every sublunary object hath this condition stamped upon it in the most legible characters.

The acquisitions of knowledge, the pursuits of learning and genius, seem the least connected with external events; yet of the satisfaction arising from these a variety of circumstances may deprive us. To furnish our own minds or those of others with the treasures of wisdom is highly commendable; great is the pleasure arising from the attainment of knowledge and the improvement of genius: yet when considered abstractedly, and separate from that delight which springs from the consciousness of having rightly improved the talents, the satisfaction  
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they confer is by no means so durable as to be proof against the various chances and changes of life. For though it may attend us through every reverse of fortune, and divert the mind from pondering on the evils it feels, or from anticipating those it apprehends, yet will it not be frequently destroyed by weakness of body or dejection of mind? Will it accompany us on the bed of sickness or in the hour of death? These, alas! are circumstances which overturn all distinction, and reduce the brightest genius or the most learned philosopher to the same humble level with the stupid idiot or the drivelling infant.

But the satisfactions of religion and virtue, being derived from God, are permanent and unchangeable as the source from whence they spring. Dark clouds may gather over us, and render all our temporal prospects obscure and dismal; the bolts of adversity may be launched at our heads and blast every earthly comfort; the storms of misfortune may deprive us of riches, power, pleasures, health, friends, may place us in the most abject state, but can they rob us of the

the consciousness of an upright heart and a benevolent conduct? Can they destroy that complacency which springs from the love of God, from our humble resignation to his will, and confidence in his goodness and mercy?—The heart engrossed with the hope of heavenly felicity, which, though remote, can be altered by no mortal contingency, has an invariable foundation whereon it may rest. In this glorious hope the interests of a temporary life are swallowed up and lost. Not even death, which tears us from every sublunary pleasure, can destroy these satisfactions. In that awful hour, the true believer experiences that religion and virtue constitute that good part which cannot be taken away, and confer a happiness which the king of terrors cannot trouble—a happiness which, from an increasing experience of God's favour and more distinct views of his wisdom and goodness, will be approaching nearer and nearer to perfection through all eternity.

Thus have we seen that religion and virtue ought to be considered and pursued as the sovereign good of man, because in the  
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highest degree agreeable to our nature, conducive to our well-being, suitable to all seasons and circumstances of life, durable and inamissible.

Suffer me now to close this discourse by affectionately exhorting you to choose what alone can make you happy in every situation; what will outweigh every disadvantage, and without which no advantages can confer lasting satisfaction. Consider well the perishable nature and uncertain tenure of all temporal good, and as the dictates of reason determine that true happiness can only be found in the ways of wisdom, there let us resolve to seek her, as in seeking we shall be sure to obtain.

Such a choice will secure to us the favour and friendship of God, who will either protect us from the numerous evils of this imperfect state, or enable us to bear them with patience, and to improve them to the advancement of our best interests.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in this important concern we are not left to the dim light of nature, and to the slow researches of reason.

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We need not spend the best years of our lives in tracing out a First Cause. In the volume of sacred truth He stands before us in all the splendour of his divine attributes, and in all the comforting relations of condescension and love, which he is pleased to assume towards us. There we behold him who is our Creator, under the endearing character of our Father, instructing, advising, supporting, pitying, promising, and, though threatening, yet pardoning, in his own appointed way, the penitent offender, and placing the crown of victory on the head of the sincere though feeble combatant.

How shall we then escape if we neglect so great salvation? What more could have been done to assist rational but free agents in the attainment of happiness, and how deplorable will be the condition of those who, in the midst of light, prefer darkness!

Would to God that the choice which I have been recommending were as universally adopted as it is just, reasonable, honourable and profitable; for wisdom is the principal thing, and for ever happy is that man that findeth wisdom.

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We need not fear the bolt of our  
fate, in rising out a tall Crane. In the  
volume of his hand, the hands before us  
in all the splendor of his divine attributes  
and in all the glory of his divine attributes  
of wisdom and love which he is pleased to  
show towards us. There we behold him  
who is our Father, under the endearing  
character of our Father, instructing and  
our supporting, giving something and  
in his language yet passing, in his  
of appointed way, the present offender,  
and placing the crown of victory on the  
head of the innocent though he is companion  
How shall we then elude him? we need to  
be silent. What more could have  
been done to attain to our true spirit in  
the attainment of happiness and how  
will be the condition of those who  
in the midst of a world of sin and  
could to God that the choice which I  
have been recommended to be as  
I have advised as a still responsible to  
no man and no man, to whom is the  
responsibility, and for every happy is that  
you find in this world.

## S E R M O N XX.

*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.* 1 COR. VI. 12.

**D**ECLAMATORY harangues against the manners of the present age, and exaggerated representations of its inferiority to former times, are equally trite and disgusting. The general sum of virtue is perhaps nearly the same in all ages, and vice varies more in kind than in degree: yet since many disorders of the mind, as well as those of the body, become epidemical at certain seasons, it is as much the duty of the preacher to guard his hearers against the infection of the former, as it is that of the physician to check the contagion of the latter. From various causes, the investigation of which would be foreign to my purpose, the present prevailing disposition is the love of pleasure.



sure. This, where the objects are in themselves lawful and innocent, and while our inclinations to them are restrained within the dictates of reason and the obligations of duty, we wish not to discourage, as it is highly amiable, and perfectly agreeable to nature. It is however a disposition which, for this very reason, requires constant attention and care, as it steals upon the mind with a power so pleasing, that it enslaves the soul before we are aware of its progress. In this case it becomes highly dangerous, as it destroys that firmness of mind, and that capacity of self-government, which are indispensably necessary to all who wish to live in a manner conformable either to their nature as rational creatures, or to their exalted vocation as Christians.

It must be obvious to every attentive observer, that the general manners and character both here and in other nations of Europe, have undergone considerable changes within the memory of many of us present, by the increase of luxury and a taste for dissipation. In these circumstances nothing can be more detrimental to the interests

rests of virtue and religion, nothing more dangerous to the moral character of individuals than the persuasion which seems universally prevalent, that pleasures or amusements, if in themselves lawful, may be indulged to any degree. In opposition to this pernicious opinion, it may be hoped that the maxim of the apostle will have some weight, as it is founded on the dictates of reason, and on an intimate knowledge of the heart of man. In discoursing upon these words, it is my intention not to dissuade you from the moderate enjoyment of lawful pleasures, or a rational love of innocent amusements, but only to remind you that these things, though lawful in themselves, become, if immoderately pursued, inexpedient and hurtful; because such an excessive devotion to them impairs the vigour of the mind, enfeebles the authority of reason, and tends to destroy that virtuous self-command which, even in trifles, we should always be able to exert.

An excessive devotion to amusements, which in themselves are lawful, is on many accounts inexpedient, that is, unadviseable



and improper. In order to render any amusements lawful, it is absolutely requisite that they be attended with no pecuniary embarrassment to those who indulge in them; an inexpediency of this nature is therefore not to be supposed, but however well we may be able to bear the demands they make on our fortune, will not the inordinate pursuit of pleasure consume too much of our time, which is infinitely more precious than gold? A large portion of your lives is necessarily spent in attending to the demands of business, and it is but reasonable that, in the intervals of this, the mind should be sometimes unbent by the enjoyment of innocent amusement. But if the intervals of business be mostly filled up with indulgencies of this kind, if our lives are divided between the pursuit of worldly gain and worldly pleasures, how small a portion of time will be left for the moral and religious culture of the heart, and for the performance of many duties, personal and social, which are incumbent upon us both as men and as Christians! But the predominant love of pleasure is inexpedient on another account: it not only leaves us  
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little time, but it generally prevents our making a proper use of that which remains. The attention becomes dissipated, the nerves of industry and application are relaxed, a languor is diffused over all our faculties, and it becomes difficult to exert them to any valuable purpose. The mind, habituated to trifles, becomes incapable of attending to any thing serious, and nothing but the view of immediate interest can induce us to apply even to what is absolutely necessary, while every thing which appears less so, though acknowledged to be our duty, is delayed from time to time, and at last entirely neglected. This must be in general the case when that, which should only be an occasional relaxation, is made a considerable part of the business of life. The performance even of the most necessary duties, instead of being attended with cheerfulness, is considered as an irksome task. The intervals of pleasure are spent either in the weary languor of exhausted spirits, or, when these are recruited, the mind is occupied in projecting new schemes of dissipation, and all that vigour of soul which was given us



for the noblest purposes, is wasted on trifles, and left to languish under the most frivolous habits.

But it may be urged that minds as well as bodies vary in their texture, and that some of greater firmness are less debilitated than others: that many, though they pursue amusements to a very great degree, carefully discharge the social virtues, and do not entirely forget the religious duties. But are not the latter frequently omitted when they happen to come into competition with their pleasures, or when performed, is it not with indifference, and without that cheerfulness and ardour which ought to accompany our devotional exercises, but which can be attained only by cultivating habits of serious recollection and devout attention?

There is another argument which the apostle seems to have thought of considerable importance, as he has mentioned it separately: "All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any."

It is impossible to make any valuable acquisition of useful knowledge, or to attain any

any degree of perfection in virtue or religion, without a certain firmness of mind which enables us to conquer our lawful passions and repress even innocent inclinations, whenever circumstances render it inexpedient to indulge them. On this power of self-government depends not only our moral and religious character, but even our eminence in our secular professions and worldly callings; upon this independence of soul rests all the dignity of the human character, as it is the only foundation of prosperity and comfort in this life, as well as the only security of our virtue, and our hopes of happiness hereafter. All the duties of rational beings in a state of probation depend upon self-government. Whatever therefore encroaches on this becoming manliness of temper, is highly pernicious to our moral, and destructive to our religious attainments.

The necessity of this self-government in conquering violent passions, and resisting strong temptations to vice, is universally allowed; but this, like all other moral attainments, is acquired and strengthened by habit, and if we accustom ourselves to yield

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to every prevailing inclination, we shall greatly weaken, and perhaps at length entirely destroy the power of self-denial. Of this men are so sensible, that a wise parent will make it a principal object in the education of his children, to regulate his indulgence by the degrees of ardour he perceives in their demands, and the dispositions they manifest when their desires are counteracted. The same conduct is highly useful with regard to ourselves: by always gratifying our inclinations in trifles, we teach them to presume upon their own importunity in greater matters, and render ourselves petulant children of a larger growth. It is therefore useful in the management of our passions, to refuse complying with them, not only when they ask improper things, but when they ask any thing with an undue degree of impatience.

Lawful pleasures and amusements are pursued without criminality only when they are confined within their proper seasons, and do not interfere with the performance of any duty: but, even in this case, we cannot enjoy them with safety or expediency, if we  
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are so attached to them as to esteem them an essential part of our happiness; so habituated to them as to be uneasy and discontented in the absence of any of them; or so engrossed by them as to be unable to apply with vigour and attention of mind to more serious subjects. When we find our love of amusement rise to this excessive degree, it is incumbent upon us to check it, and by frequent exertions of self-denial to conquer our own hearts. This is absolutely necessary in order to avoid the crime of being "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

When engaged in scenes of amusement, the mind is relaxed, and in the unguarded moment of cheerfulness we are liable to transgress the limits which we are at other times careful to preserve. Who is there that has not at such seasons said or done things which have exposed him to the censure of others, and for which, in the sober hour of reflection, he has severely condemned himself?—With regard to others, we ought to make the most candid and charitable allowances for the frailties into which they are surprised from the unsuspicious openness of  
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a social and benevolent heart. But this circumstance shews the absolute necessity of interposing seasons of recollection and self-examination, that we may check this unguarded levity, impress religious sentiments more deeply in our hearts, and prevent occasional follies from growing into confirmed and habitual crimes. If, neglecting this, we devote ourselves principally to the recreations of the world, habits of carelessness and levity will grow upon us, to a degree which we shall find it difficult, if not impossible, to conquer; our hearts will be gradually alienated from the love of God, our virtue will be no longer sustained by the principles and motives of religion, but will depend merely on our regard for worldly reputation and interest. And how feeble will be these supports when we have lost the power of self-government, and are "like a city that is broken down and without walls;" open and defenceless amidst temptations, which, strengthened by our weakness, will assault us on every side.

These are inconveniencies attending an immoderate love and excessive pursuit of the  
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most lawful pleasures, which will affect even the most opulent and wealthy. And though some, of greater natural fortitude, may feel these ill consequences in a less degree than others, yet let such consider, that their examples may be highly detrimental to the welfare of society, by ensnaring others of weaker minds to attempt the same dangerous experiment.

But in vain would those of a more elevated station attempt to confine the immoderate pursuit of pleasure within their own circle. In this, as in every thing else, they will be imitated by their inferiors, who will naturally catch the prevailing taste, and strain every nerve to emulate the splendour of their superiors in wealth, without considering that what is only inexpedient in those of greater affluence, is highly criminal in others, whose circumstances are more contracted. In such all the ill consequences of an immoderate attachment to pleasure, which we have already surveyed, are aggravated and increased by circumstances too numerous, as well as too obvious to be detailed.

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A love of pleasure is natural to us, nor do I mean severely to declaim against an occasional participation of such things as are in themselves innocent: some amusements are indeed preferable to others, as they have this advantage, that, when properly pursued, they inform the mind and inspire a love of virtue, at the same time that they give pleasure to the imagination, and agreeably excite the affections. Of this nature are the elegant and rational pleasures of conversation, the perusal of well chosen works of genius and fancy, and the cultivation of those studies which come under the denomination of the fine arts. Games of skill, though they neither inform nor improve the mind, are not always reprehensible, provided ill success does not ruffle the serenity of our tempers or injure our circumstances; but nothing can vindicate that fashionable vice of our day which excites violent and uneasy passions, or is prejudicial to our own fortunes or those of others. But after engaging in the above, or any other kinds of amusement, it will always be useful seriously to examine your own hearts, and if you find  
your

your affections so deeply interested that you cannot with cheerful indifference resign them, whenever they come into competition with any duty, or more serious pursuit, it will be prudent to deny yourselves a repetition of the indulgence, and thus endeavour to wean your hearts from too great an attachment to them.

As the love of pleasure is naturally most ardent in youth, young persons should be particularly careful to avoid an undue attachment even to innocent amusements. Those who are under the direction of wise parents are in this respect peculiarly happy, and ought gratefully to submit to whatever restraint in this article, *their* wisdom and affection might think fit to impose. If their superior judgment controul your inclinations in this particular, it is your duty cheerfully to obey, and to resign yourselves to their guidance. If you suffer a disappointment to abate your affection to them, what ungrateful as well as thoughtless creatures must you be! How little impression must the tenderest love and most anxious care have made upon your hearts! If you disobey them,  
and



and treat their orders with contempt, you are highly criminal—you render those miserable whose happiness it should be your chief study to promote, and you injure yourselves in the worst manner: if you proceed openly, you lay a certain foundation for future profligacy; if secretly, for future hypocrisy.

As none of you, be your fortune or expectations what they may, can live either with comfort or reputation, if you make pleasure your sole object and employment; and as none can advance their worldly interests, or gain a subsistence by the pursuit of amusement, it is incumbent upon every young person, and particularly those who are designed for active life, that they do not suffer their love of pleasure to interfere with those pursuits which are to prepare them for their future employments, either by taking up too much of their time, or by destroying their habits of industry and application.

Were we to trace the progress of vice in those unhappy wretches, whose lives have been justly forfeited to the violated laws of their country, we should find that many of  
them

them have been the children of honest and reputable parents, and that their crimes originated from an excessive attachment to pleasures, perhaps at first innocent, but which by wasting their substance and destroying their habits of application, rendered them idle and profligate, and exposed them without defence to every temptation. And it has frequently been observed that many of those miserable females, who lost to every sense of decency and virtue gain a wretched subsistence by prostitution, have been educated in expensive habits of show and dissipation by parents unable to secure to them a support beyond their own lives. Cruel fathers ! thus to cast your children on the world destitute of support, and yet without those habits of industry which might enable them to procure an honest maintenance; circumstances, which combined with an immoderate love of expence and pleasure, must render them an easy prey to those seductions which otherwise perhaps they would nobly scorn.

In short, life is too serious a thing to be wasted in mere amusement, or to be wholly



employed in any pursuits, that relate to this world alone. The time allotted for our residence here is an important trust, of which we must one day render an awful account. It is not enough that we have done no harm with it, for the slothful servant in the parable was condemned to punishment, though he had not abused, but only neglected to improve, his talent : nor do we find by a discriminating attention to the story of Dives, at whose gate Lazarus was laid as a poor suffering destitute mendicant, that the leading features of his character were those of vice and immorality. He was amply possessed of the good things of life, he enjoyed them in a manner, and with expences, answerable to his fortune and situation. His apparel, his table, his house, and every thing which surrounded him bore the marks of affluence and elegance; distinctions which accompanied him even beyond that verge where nature has appointed them to cease. A selfish regard to personal gratification, a devotedness to ease and indulgence, and a consequent neglect of the wants of others, are the only accusations brought against this

man

man of the world ; yet we find these sufficient to incapacitate him for, and exclude him from, the happiness of another. We must therefore employ our time, in a manner answerable to the grand purposes for which it was given ; and though we need not absolutely renounce the enjoyment of innocent pleasures, at their proper seasons ; yet we must be careful that they do not encroach upon either our religious or our secular duties, and that our application and diligence in any of these be not impaired by them. The love of God and of virtue, together with a sincere and regular attention to the duties of religion, are the best antidotes against an immoderate attachment to pleasure. These, without destroying the innocent enjoyment of life, will render us superior to its allurements. The habitual tendency of our minds will then be towards the sublime objects for which life was given : our prevailing tastes will have some connection with our future pleasures ; even our occupations will be made subservient to our advancement in virtue and holiness, and “ the mammon of unrighteousness,” or the



wealth of this world, will minister to the true riches. Our treasure being in heaven our hearts will be there also, and we shall, on the one hand, avoid that degradation of character which must belong to those who are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," and, on the other, that levity and inconstance which is the natural consequence of a divided and opposite pursuit, and the deplorable condition of too many in the present day. Let us then, under the divine blessing, seek to improve our time of probation, whether longer or shorter, in the manner which at the awful season of our dissolution we shall wish to have done. If such be our resolution, and such our general and corresponding conduct, we shall, through the mercy of God in Christ, obtain, at the great and solemn day of retribution, this approving sentence "well done good and faithful Servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

SER-

## S E R M O N XXI.

*If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee; then how wilt thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?* JEREMIAH xii. 5.

**T**HERE is no moral delusion more dangerous or more common, than that which men practise upon themselves, when they plead their abstaining from open and flagitious crimes, as an excuse for their indulging private and less enormous vices. They suppose themselves secure against temptations to greater iniquity, and imagine that their smaller offences argue no depravity of heart or general disposition to sin: that when vice appears undisguised in all its horrid colours and deformity, it will excite an aversion, which will effectually deter them



from forming any intimacy with it. But among many others this is one delusion of sin : that it artfully makes its approach by small degrees. It silently undermines the foundation of innocence, watches a fair opportunity of assault ; and when it sees caution off its guard, then vice makes the attack, and loads man with its disgraceful fetters.

How very absurd is it then to imagine that we shall be able to conquer a greater, when we have yielded to a less temptation ! to think that the mind will be fortified against a stronger, when it has been subdued by a weaker attack ! to suppose, that after having fallen in the contest with one enemy, another of superior strength shall fall before us ! or, to use the metaphorical language of the text, " If we have run with the footmen and they have wearied us, how shall we contend with horses ? and if in the land of peace wherein we trusted they wearied us then how shall we do in the swellings of Jordan ! "

Man is endued with reason. It is the distinguishing mark and glory of his nature.

When

When he acts agreeably to its dictates, the end of divine wisdom is answered. This principle properly informed and its laws obeyed, man finds peace, joy, and consolation. Passion and prejudice blind this internal director, prevent its operations, destroy its activity, defeat its purposes, repress its aspirings, frustrate its attempts, and perplex its designs. For the proof of this, survey those melancholy instances which every day presents to our view of the dominion of vice, and of its tyranny over the minds and actions of men. Mark beings, so entirely debased, that the Scriptures are well authorized to characterize them by fools; devoid of all wisdom and reason; losing the distinguishing part of their being, and defeating those benevolent intentions of God, which are evident in their moral endowments. It therefore becomes the duty of every preacher not only to represent, but also to endeavour to detect the delusions by which sin effects the destruction of its deceived votaries.

It is readily acknowledged that there are many, who, though they habitually neglect



or violate their duty in less matters, do not proceed to any very great lengths in vice. But is it not highly absurd to think, that for this reason they never will? that, because some parts of duty are transgressed, and others omitted, those which remain will be more conscientiously performed? Virtue and vice are essentially different in their nature and tendency: the cause of the one can never flourish, while the interest of the other is promoted: they are utterly irreconcilable. Virtue can have no security from vice, nor can vice form an intimacy with virtue: they repel each other, and are in their nature directly opposite. What communion can the un sullied light of a religious character have with the obscene and palpable darkness of sin?

We are not indeed to suppose that, in order to form what may properly be called a virtuous character, every blemish of sin must be absent; or that the robe of innocence can be worn, without any spot of moral defilement. Imperfection necessarily cleaves to man; "there is none that liveth and sinneth not, no not one." But in this case, it is the

the deliberate choice and indulgence of vice that discriminates the character. Where no such deliberate choice and indulgence are found; where the intentions of the mind are prevailingly good, and no evil affections habitually and wilfully cherished, the character, notwithstanding many imperfections or sudden deviations from duty, may properly be considered as virtuous. Every good man feels his faults; every sinner feels his iniquity. The former is sorry for and disallows them. The latter extenuates, and persists in them with seeming approbation of his conduct. This sorrow and disallowance on the one hand; this extenuation and seeming approbation on the other, essentially distinguish the characters.

It is to the man who indulges himself in the commission of smaller sins that we would address the cautionary interrogation of the text; the man, who ventures upon vice in some instances of an inferior kind, with the confidence of security from greater temptation; who pleads his freedom from other vices, in excuse for his allowed transgression. Thus the Pharisee in the parable pleaded



pleaded his freedom from extortion, adultery, and the open violation of the laws of society, as an excuse for vices which he indulged and cherished. Thus the avaritious man urges his temperance and abstemiousness as a justification for his rapacity, and love of wealth; thus the man of pleasure will plead his generosity and benevolence, in order to reconcile himself to his less worthy pursuits. And this pernicious mode of arguing will always be adopted, where men are determined at all events to indulge those vices, to which they are particularly prone. But what security can they derive from virtue, as long as they wilfully cherish sinful affections and habits? Men, as well as things, are liable to change; their passions are varied by age, situation, and a thousand other circumstances. The frequent indulgence of a favourite vice will sometimes destroy all relish for it, and even render it disgusting. When this happens, it is probable that some other will as easily and as successfully beset them, as the first. If we indulge only one particular sin because we are more strongly attracted towards it than to-  
wards

wards any other; the case will probably be the same, if any other vice should seize upon us with equal temptations: We shall fall as easily by this, as we were subdued by the other. We shall adhere to it with similar pleasure, shall practise it with equal avidity, suspend all duties for its indulgence, and delude ourselves with the same fallacious reasoning as in the former instance.

The prepossessions in favour of duty are so strong, that men even plead their observance of it, in some instances, as an excuse for their violation of it in others. Thus they have often been led to substitute something instead of obedience; hence all the oblations, ceremonies and sacrifices of superstition. The tithes of mint and cummin were scrupulously paid, while the weighty matters of the law, and the sacred virtues of humanity were neglected. Hence the boast of good works to fascinate the eyes of deluded mortals, and to compensate for the sins which sit closest to the depraved affections, to which the omniscient eye of God himself is privy. But the Almighty, says the sinner, is not strict to mark iniquity, though he is plen-



plenteous in rewarding mercy: therefore all my obedience will not be unnoticed or unrewarded, and the few offences I have committed, to which I was either constitutionally prone, or into which I was betrayed by those very imperfections to which mortals are liable, will certainly be passed by without strict animadversion, at least without severity of judgment. But let us not deceive ourselves with such groundless reasoning. God knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are but dust. He will make every kind allowance for human imperfections, for the violence of passion and the strength of temptations; but he will not accept of an obedience that is intentionally partial, because such an obedience cannot proceed from right principles, nor can it be productive of that improvement of the moral faculties, of that internal goodness of heart which must be the foundation of all our happiness in a future state, and without which we must be miserable even amidst the enjoyments of heaven. It is for this reason that our blessed Lord tells us, that whosoever allows himself in the breach of what he may esteem "one  
of

“ of the least of the commandments of the moral law, is guilty of all,” because they are all derived from the same authority, which authority is treated with contempt in whatever instance it is habitually disregarded; and the great law of love, on the observance of which the whole of our improvement and happiness depend, is equally violated by an allowed disobedience, whether it relate to one precept or to another.

We generally suppose some future period is much fitter than the present for executing any arduous design. We vainly imagine, either that our strength will increase, or that some accident will afford us a better opportunity of exerting it; that we can disencumber ourselves at pleasure of the burden we bear; and thus we patiently bend beneath the yoke of sin, and submit to its tyranny even when its chains miserably afflict us. We idly think, that upon some future occasion we shall be able to summon up all our fortitude, and easily to conquer the foe that has so often mastered us. We are apt to suppose, that we can enter into the service of virtue, whenever the cause of vice becomes



comes hazardous, or our revolt from virtue is likely to be punished.—Vain delusion!—If filken cords will bind us, what will not chains of iron do?—If we fell by the first advances of sin, which then generally comes with smaller force, what probability have we of success when it employs all its artful stratagems to overcome us?—We may as well suppose, that we can bear the perilous storms of adversity, when we have not been able to struggle with the common evils of life, as that we can stand against the powerful attacks of vice, when we have been already subdued by its artful wiles. Security is man's greatest enemy; and if ever we rest in it, and make concessions to vice, our ruin is nearly certain: the fell destroyer will soon throw all into horrid confusion. In vain shall we then attempt to rally our scattered powers, to summon our fortitude, or exert our courage. Our best resolution will fail—we shall be amazed to find that so little of it remains, and astonished to discover that the strength in which we trusted is enervated; and how weakly all those virtues exert themselves in which we once vainly

con-

confided. At length, unable to resist, we  
 shall basely yield to the conquering foe, pas-  
 sively receive the oppressive fetters of sin,  
 and bear with abject submission our ignomi-  
 nious bondage. All the goodly edifice of  
 virtue and true religion will be levelled to  
 the ground—its beauty all lost, its dignity  
 all degraded, and its glory all eclipsed.—  
 Then will vice exult and tyrannize at large,  
 and instead of the liberty it promised its de-  
 luded votaries, instead of the empty hope  
 that futurity should bring with it no fatal  
 consequences, the sinner will experience the  
 chains of bondage and the misery of confine-  
 ment. Dread disquietude and gloomy fear  
 will haunt him wherever he goes, and pain-  
 ful remorse will harass and torment him.—  
 “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of  
 “liberty, and continueth therein,” will find  
 that the sentiments of religion and virtue,  
 which he has perseveringly cultivated under  
 the influence of divine grace, and in the  
 humble hope of acceptance and mercy, will  
 yield, even on this side the grave, pleasure,  
 peace, harmony, self-complacency, divine  
 consolation, joy and hope. These will con-  
 spire



spire in a delightful union to support and cheer the soul of the true Christian: they will inspire her aims, exalt her views, open to her the prospect of perfect and ever-enduring happiness, which the Father of mercies has designed for man, and which he will at length confer, through the Son of his love, on all those who have sincerely endeavoured to obey his laws, to cultivate the dispositions of love to God and their neighbour, and to "dive soberly, righteously and godly in this present world."

that luxury should bring consequences, the sinner will experience the chains of bondage and the misery of confinement. Dread dissipation and gloomy fear will haunt him wherever he goes, and painful remorse will harass and torment him. — "But whose love is the perfect law of liberty, and conlieth therein," will find that the restraints of religion and virtue, which he has pertinaciously undervalued under the influence of divine grace, and in the humble hope of acceptance and mercy, will yield, even on this side the grave, pleasure, peace, harmony, self-complacency, divine consolation, joy and hope. I have will con-

SER-

## S E R M O N XXII.

*So teach us to number our days, that we may  
apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

PSALM XC. 12.

**I**T is of great importance that we should sometimes make a pause, as it were, in the journey of human life, to ask ourselves what we are, and whither we are tending; and for this purpose what period can be more proper than the present, when through divine goodness we are permitted to see the conclusion of the past and the beginning of the present year?

It is to assist you in these important inquiries that I have chosen these words, which form part of the prayer of Moses, composed in consequence of that awful sentence which condemned the Israelites to die in the wilderness, as a punishment for their frequent rebellions against God.



This solemn dispensation of Providence led the Psalmist into a train of reflections upon the brevity of human life, the contemplation of which induced him to offer the excellent petition which is now to be the subject of our meditations, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

The prayer that God would teach us to number our days, by no means implies a desire that he would give us a particular knowledge of the term of our existence here. The exact bounds of every man's life are in mercy concealed from the sons of men, because the knowledge of them, by filling the mind with grief and terror, would produce evil rather than good; to attempt therefore to number our days in this sense would be a vain, and, let me add, a very sinful kind of curiosity.

The expression of numbering our days implies several important duties, which, in humble dependence on the divine blessing, we should endeavour constantly and habitually to practise.

It implies, that we impress our minds with  
a deep

a deep and constant sense of the brevity of life in general. Of this we ought frequently and seriously to think, as of an obvious fundamental truth which admits of no dispute, and which ought constantly to influence our practice. To render us deeply sensible of this, the pious Psalmist here presents us with an affecting picture, in which all the powers of comparison are introduced, and applied with the utmost justice and propriety. He represents us like straws floating upon the stream of time, carried away as with a flood: and as if this image was not sufficiently strong to represent our frailty, he adds, that "in the morning we are like grass which groweth up; in the morning it flourisheth and groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withered." To heighten the metaphor, we are said "to spend our years as a tale that is told," to intimate that they imperceptibly glide away, and are gone before we are aware.

Such is life even at its longest date; but of the many millions of the sons of men who enter upon it, how few attain this period! For short as life is in its utmost duration, it



is shorter far to the generality, who drop and vanish in the intermediate parts of their journey through the world. We are beset as with an host of enemies in battle array against us on every side. Numberless are the calamities to which we are hourly liable, by the least of which we may be instantly snatched away. Who can properly represent the delicacy and frailty of our bodily organs, which the slightest injury is capable of disturbing, and even of destroying! How many are the diseases which await us in every period of life—many of these the effects of our own carelessness, rashness and presumption, and not a few, interwoven with our constitutions, gain strength as we advance in years, and at last break forth and consume us!

To number our days aright we must also consider how much of our time is already past. Some of us have spent twenty, thirty, or forty, others fifty or sixty years in the world; some of us are in the morning, some in the noon, others in the evening of life. With regard to those of the last class, most of their days are past; and, though they  
should

should reach the utmost verge of human life, the remaining part of their existence here cannot be very long. It is particularly incumbent upon the hoary head seriously to think on this: but let not those in middle life, or in the morning of their days, imagine that they are exempted from this duty, for the duration of their lives may be far short of the general period, and their end may be much nearer than they are willing to imagine.

Whether that part of our life which is already past be greater or less, it is irrevocably gone. Our past hours are never to return; but are, as the moral poet \* finely expresses it, "with the years before the flood;" and our recollection of them will be of little service to us, unless we seriously reflect on the manner in which we have spent them, and by meditating on past errors endeavour to acquire wisdom to direct us in the use of whatever portion of time Providence may yet grant.

Our blessed Lord observes, that "he must work the work of him that sent him while

\* Young's Night Thoughts.



“ it is day, for the night cometh in which  
 “ no man can work.” This we may with  
 propriety apply to ourselves: life is our  
 day, in which we must perform the task  
 assigned us; this is to secure and improve  
 an interest in that great salvation of God  
 which is proffered to us by Jesus Christ.  
 This is the one thing needful; needful at all  
 times, and for all persons. It is a work  
 which requires all our care, and will claim  
 our attention to the latest period of our pre-  
 sent pilgrimage. The task is alike to all,  
 not so the time in which it must be comple-  
 ted. To some the day ends early; to others  
 at noon, and few, very few, attain the even-  
 ing of old age. Is it not then of great im-  
 portance to inquire what proportion our  
 progress in our great work bears to the time  
 we have already enjoyed?—Look back on  
 life, consider your days that are spent, and  
 ask yourselves seriously how they are past?  
 —How many have been your days of va-  
 cancy and emptiness?—Those for example  
 of infancy and childhood, in which your  
 life was little more than mere animal exis-  
 tence. How many have slipped away amidst  
 the

the inconsideration and levity of youth, perhaps, alas ! in its folly and madness.—A third part of our lives at least is devoted to sleep, a state in which we can hardly be said to have a rational existence. Reflect how many more have been embittered with sickness, or with other kinds of affliction, in which perhaps the powers of your souls were rendered incapable of attending to your great work ! How many of your years have been filled with weariness and vanity, and devoted, not to the more serious and weighty employments, but to the mere trifles of life. Subtract all these from the account, and, alas ! during how small a part of your time have you really lived !—But let me call you to attend to a yet more humiliating consideration. Compute the days you have devoted merely to the world, in either business or pleasure, and how few, how very few to God and religion ; even while you acknowledge that these are objects infinitely more important than any others, and absolutely necessary to your final happiness ! After such a review, have we not all reason to be amazed at our own folly and



sinful neglect on the one hand, and at the forbearance and bounty of God on the other?

How many of us may say each of himself,  
 “ A large part of the time allotted to human  
 “ life is already past since I came into the  
 “ world, and have been favoured with the  
 “ use of reason, the dictates of conscience,  
 “ and the aids of the Gospel revelation. God  
 “ has been dealing with me in various ways  
 “ of mercy, but, alas! the corruptions of  
 “ my heart have often rendered me unmoved  
 “ by all these kindly motives. And if,  
 “ through the benevolent arrangements of  
 “ Providence, my life has not been stained  
 “ with enormous crimes, it has however  
 “ been debased by dissipation, negligence,  
 “ and a carelessness of improving the mer-  
 “ cies I have enjoyed! Notwithstanding all  
 “ this unworthiness, God still spares me, still  
 “ continues opportunities of returning from  
 “ the error of my ways, and becoming wise  
 “ unto eternal salvation.”—Let us seriously  
 consider these things, and thus number our  
 days in such a manner as may lead us to  
 apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Wis.

Wisdom, properly defined, is the choice of the noblest ends, and the diligent use and application of the most proper means for acquiring them. In each of these respects it remarkably agrees with the wisdom of religion, which by the apostle is said to be from above. This proposes to us no less than the salvation of our souls, and the acquisition of perfect and eternal felicity, the noblest ends we can possibly have in view, and the means it recommends are "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God" in the exercise of faith, and in the practice of virtue.

What can be better adapted to promote this wisdom in our hearts than such an enumeration of our days as we have just considered? Will not this tend to produce a serious and religious concern how to redeem and improve our future time to the best advantage? It will assist in correcting our mistakes, and in rectifying our judgments concerning the enjoyments and pursuits of time and sense; and thus prevent our overvaluing them, as it will remind us of their short duration, and of their insufficiency to  
afford



afford us full satisfaction. This will divest them of that false and fascinating glare by which they too often impose on the imagination and, through this delusive medium, upon the understanding. Thus shall we learn, not to despise them, but to enjoy them with moderation and thankfulness as the gifts of a benevolent providence, and as talents which are to be improved by us to purposes infinitely more valuable than the mere gratifications of sense. In proportion as we thus learn to judge aright of these objects, will moral attainments rise in our esteem, and the important truths of religion acquire an ascendancy over our hearts. Hence our affections will be better regulated, and, as we shall no longer immoderately fix them on things below, we shall direct them with greater ardour and seriousness to the invisible realities of the future world "where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God."

Short and precarious as this life is, it is of infinite value to us when considered with respect to that future existence which is to succeed it. Though it passeth away like a shadow,

shadow, and is vain as a dream of the night; though it withereth like grass, fadeth like a flower of the field, or vanisheth suddenly like a vapour, yet is it the foundation upon which not only all our present blessings but also all our hopes of future happiness must depend. Consider it then as the term allotted us for the improvement of our rational and moral faculties, for laying aside the follies of moral childhood and acquiring that true wisdom and those habits of piety and virtue, that dignity and excellence of character, which the Apostle expresses by the perfection of manhood, and styles "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." When we reflect upon life in this view, of what importance does it appear! What an immense work have we to do, and how little time in which to perform it!

Under the Mosaic dispensation length of days was esteemed a blessing. It is beautifully represented as a privilege which Wisdom has to bestow on her votaries; and long life in the promised land, was one of the motives by which God himself enforced the duty of filial piety. But, to accountable beings,



beings, accumulated years can be no blessing, unless they are spent in the practice of religion and virtue; any more than grey hairs can be an honour if not found in the way of wisdom. Can there be an object more contemptible than that of an aged sinner? But if contemptible, how still more awful!

What therefore the exhortation of the text has solely in view, is to lead us by the consideration of the brevity and uncertainty, yet infinite importance of life, to improve it to the excellent end for which it was given. Then, though but a few years should mark our earthly course, yet by activity and diligence we shall have performed our task, and having lived much in a comparatively short time, we shall be ready to depart. And surely to a mind thus prepared, and thus disposed, the sentence of dismissal from a mortal to an immortal state can never come too soon. If then Divine Wisdom should see fit to issue it at an early hour, we may count it joy and gain. We shall hereby escape those years of labour and sorrow in which to affirm that man has no pleasure, is certainly  
to

to say the least, since he too frequently becomes a burden to himself and others.

What can appear more frivolous in its actual existence than the pursuits and occupations of childhood? yet upon the proper improvement of this season depends the wisdom, utility and happiness of riper years. Thus it is with life, which is the period of our education for a future state, and unless we duly employ this time, we shall be more unqualified to derive happiness from the enjoyments even of heaven, than the most rude uncultivated peasant can be to receive pleasure or instruction from the abstruse researches of philosophy.

As we advance in life, our tastes, like ourselves, undergo a change. We no longer take pleasure in the pursuits and objects which occupied our former years. These we are apt to despise as vain and trifling, and to turn our views to others, which, though perhaps not more satisfactory, we fondly suppose are more worthy of men. Would to God we availed ourselves aright of the changes in our disposition, which are so well calculated to promote our moral advance-



vancement! That when we discern the emptiness of those follies, which, in a preceding period had for awhile amused us, we may exchange them, not for other follies which in some future time will appear equally vain, but, for that religious wisdom which is here recommended. This we shall never regret; but when that awful hour shall come when the world and its pursuits shall appear unimportant and undesirable, we shall congratulate ourselves that, by attending to the admonitions of the word and providence of God, we have been taught so to number our days as to apply our hearts to that wisdom, which is from above, the only true source of happiness in this world, and the only preparation for everlasting felicity in the world to come.

SER.

## S E R M O N    XXIII.

*And the Lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely ; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. LUKE XVI. 8.*

THE most pernicious and poisonous productions of the vegetable and mineral worlds, when under the management of a skilful hand, may be converted into a salutary medicine. And thus, in the moral world, lessons of heavenly wisdom may be derived, by a skilful instructor, from the examples even of the wicked and unjust. Of this, we have a striking proof in the words of the text, in which our blessed Lord commands his followers to learn a lesson of wisdom from the unjust steward, whose story he had just related. His behaviour had been unfaithful and iniquitous, especially in the conclusion of his transaction with his Lord's debtors.

One



One would have expected that, when his master heard of this additional piece of fraud, he would have been more exasperated than ever against so base a servant. Yet, instead of this, our Lord tells us, that "he commended the unjust steward," i. e. he admired the dexterity and address of the man, while he condemned his injustice; and immediately subjoins this piece of instruction derived from his conduct, that "the children of this world are, in their generation wiser than the children of light."

Two general characters are here opposed to each other, under which all mankind may be ranked—the *children of this world*, and the *children of light*. And before we proceed further, it may be proper to inquire into the meaning of these expressions.

Besides the proper and literal sense, in which the word *children* is used in Scripture, to signify the immediate natural offspring of parents, it is frequently applied in a figurative sense, to denote the followers of any particular person, whose doctrines they embrace, and whose practice they imitate. Thus all who resemble Abraham in  
their

their faith are emphatically styled "children of Abraham;" and upon the same principle, wicked men are called "children of the devil." It is also used to denote any particular habit or disposition of the mind, whether good or bad; in this sense, good men are styled "the children of wisdom," and wicked men "the children of iniquity." Hof. x. 9.

The children of this world, then, are those who doat upon this world as their best and only portion, and are governed by the influence of its maxims in the whole of their conduct. It presents a variety of pursuits, each of which has its votaries, who perhaps will inveigh loudly against the folly of those who engage in a different track; but they all agree in this, that this place of their habitation is the grand object which engrosses all their attention: the world is the master they serve, the idol they worship, and the only thing in which they can discover any excellence. Its employments fill up all their hours of business, and its pleasures occupy all their moments of leisure. Thus they are perpetually engaged with either the one or



the other, and so infatuated with both, that they neither hope nor desire any thing beyond what this earth can afford.

Opposed to these, is the character of the children of light, by which term we are to understand those who are habitually under the influence of the noblest and best kind of knowledge, that which is divine, and which is frequently mentioned in Scripture under the metaphor of light. In a general sense all those may be styled the children of light, who enjoy the benefits and blessings of the gospel institution. But *here* it must be understood in a more particular sense, denoting those who are the faithful followers of Christ, in opposition to merely nominal professors: those, who by obeying the commands, and imitating the example of their Saviour, prove themselves to be the children of God; who are animated with the views and hopes of life and happiness eternal, to "press forward toward the mark, " for the prize of the high calling of God " in Christ." These are, in the highest sense, the children of light. And is it not surprising that persons of this character should stand

stand reproved by the sordid hopes, views and actions of the children of this world, or needed to learn any thing from them? Yet, alas! so it is: for we see that our Lord commends the unjust steward, who is the representative of the children of this world, and therefore in some sense commends them as wiser in their generation than the children of light.

Let it however be observed that by this commendation our Lord meant not to assert that the unjust steward, or the children of this world, are truly wise. He who prefers time to eternity, or the interests of his frail perishing body, to those of his immortal soul; he who doats upon a transitory world, as if it were his all, and as if he neither hoped nor wished for any thing beyond it; acts a part egregiously irrational; and however he may be applauded by the worldly wise, the sacred oracles justly stigmatize him as ignorant of the nature, and insensible of the value of true wisdom, and point out his folly as of the most absurd and destructive nature.

What he intended here, was only to shew



that the men of this world are more sagacious and politic, more careful and diligent, in the prosecution of those schemes which engross their attention, than the generality even of good christians are, in the prosecution of those momentous affairs, which belong to their eternal peace. Our Lord illustrates this assertion by the example even of an unworthy character, in order to render it more striking; he justly discriminates between the qualities of diligence and prudence, and the unworthy purposes to which they are applied: the former, as in themselves useful and valuable, he warmly recommends; the latter, he strongly condemns, by giving the steward the appellation of unjust.

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise,” is the address of Solomon to those who indulge a spirit of indolence and sloth. — But in the text, we have a greater than Solomon, who mingles instruction with reproof, and who in effect says to his faithful followers, “I approve your zeal, your fidelity and diligence in the main; nevertheless I have some faults  
“to

“ to censure: you are not so sagacious in con-  
 “ triving to make the best of your advanta-  
 “ ges, nor so active and fervent in prosecut-  
 “ ing them, as your true interest and my  
 “ commands require. Go therefore even to  
 “ the sordid and worldly part of mankind,  
 “ and copy that sagacity and diligence, for  
 “ which the generality of them are remark-  
 “ able; only differing from them with res-  
 “ pect to the objects you pursue.”

From the children of this world then,  
 Christians should learn to consider wherein  
 their true interest lies, and to establish it as  
 their chief end. They are unwearied in the  
 examination of the several matters that oc-  
 cur to them, from which they hope to reap  
 any advantage. Their grand aim is to study  
 what branch of business, or what pursuits  
 are most suitable to their particular interests;  
 and when they have duly fixed this point,  
 they have it always uppermost in their  
 minds, and keep it perpetually in view. It  
 is the subject of their meditation by night  
 and by day, the attention of their minds is  
 continually bent towards it, and their seve-  
 ral powers of understanding, memory, will



and invention, are all harmonized and employed in pursuit of it, as their determined and principal end. Thus they act in their affairs; and thus ought we to act with regard to our eternal concerns. We should look upon the salvation of our souls as our highest and best interest, as a concern to which all others, how important soever the world may pronounce them, bear no more proportion than time does to eternity. This we should fix as our grand purpose, for which we were made rational beings, and endowed with the inestimable privileges of our holy religion. This it becomes us to have constantly in view, and to promote this, all the powers of our rational nature should be strictly combined and vigorously exerted.

From the children of this world Christians may also learn to reject, and guard against every thing that may be detrimental to their main end. They trust not to appearances, with respect either to men or things; but as they know wherein their interest principally lies, they are perpetually watchful that it sustains no injury from any event which it  
may

may be in their power to prevent. This renders them diligent to give every concern that falls in their way a deliberate examination, and induces them often to check their own desires, or disappoint their own appetites and inclinations, with a view to the more certain accomplishment of what they deem their chief end.

But can we, who are distinguished by the name of Christians, and as such ought to be the children of light, can we stand forth and assert that we are thus watchful and diligent; that we are not imposed upon by the allurements of the world, though we know them to be highly destructive to our faith and privileges? Here, then, let us stand reprov'd, and learn wisdom from "the children of the world," as they are always upon their guard against every thing that would be detrimental to their interest, as they diligently keep, and frequently examine their accounts: so let us in our religious concerns, be careful not to run into danger: so let us guard against temptations and indiscretions, which may blemish our character, and wound the peace of our minds: so let us frequently ex-



amine the great account between God and our souls.

From the children of this world we may also learn a solicitude to make all inferior pursuits subservient to our main end. In whatever scenes they are engaged, they keep this perpetually in view; nay, many of them are such admirable proficient in the arts of gain, that their very amusements and diversions shall, in some respect or other, be subservient to their principal object, with which they are so engrossed, that wherever they are, or whatever they do, they always labour in some measure to promote it.

Hence we ought to learn, while we are pursuing our lawful and necessary affairs in the world, to make them subservient in some measure to our eternal interests. In all our enjoyments we ought to have an eye to God, and to his favour, as our supreme good. In the pursuit of our secular affairs we must behave uprightly and diligently, from a principle of duty to God, as well as from a view of acquiring reputation, and gaining a decent subsistence. We must be careful that our amusements and diversions are lawful,  
and

and must be solicitous not to render them, though in themselves innocent, hurtful, by employing too much time or thought upon them, thereby unfitting our minds for the service of God and of our fellow-creatures. In short, we should never forget that we are Christians, and that as such we have immortal prospects opened to us in the Gospel of our blessed Redeemer. In all our actions and enjoyments, in all our pursuits and engagements, we should endeavour to improve our hearts, and to promote our interests for eternity, as well as to advance those of time.

The children of this world, who are wise in their generation, are careful to embrace and to improve every opportunity of increasing their honours or their property, and of gaining their desired end. Their time is as precious to them as their wealth, and they are always upon the watch, either to make or to redeem opportunities, well knowing that if they let them escape, it is possible they may never return; at least, never with such favourable circumstances. In this they are a useful example to Christians, in their religious concerns: for we cannot hope



to obtain the approbation of God and of our own consciences, unless we be careful to improve all the opportunities which Providence gives us for the advancement of our eternal welfare. In this light we ought to consider and improve our health and possessions, for they are intended for this purpose, and are never so truly enjoyed as when they are consecrated to this great end. More especially ought we to regard all the ordinances of the Gospel in this view; and as we have "line upon line, and precept upon precept," returning opportunities of public worship, and of celebrating the Supper of our Lord, we should be concerned to improve them to our advancement in virtue and holiness.

From persons of this character we may also learn diligence and resolution amidst surrounding difficulties. They expect not that every scheme will go on smoothly with them, and are therefore careful to provide against the worst; and whatever they have planned they prosecute with unwearied application, till they have accomplished their point. They are ready to submit to many instances

instances of self-denial, if this can be conducive to their success, and willingly sacrifice their ease and pleasure to their interest. They will rise up early and sit up late, rack their minds and weary their bodies, give no sleep to their eyes nor slumber to their eyelids, till they have secured the advantages they had in view. So far are they from being depressed by small difficulties and disappointments, that they often acquire new courage and spirit from them, and sometimes owe their success in life to the prudence and courage acquired from early miscarriages.

And are not we, as Christians, involved in circumstances which can never end happily with us, unless we exercise labour and diligence in our vocation, as the men of the world do in theirs? Though the Christian profession be liberty in the noblest sense, it enjoins a labour and diligence of a very high and honourable nature; for without this it would be licentiousness. Our great Master, in his word, sets our Christian course before us under a variety of figures, all of them adapted to impress upon us a deep persuasion of the necessity of diligence and resolution.



tion. Sometimes it is spoken of as a warfare, sometimes as a race, and sometimes as a pilgrimage, all which are strongly expressive of labour and exertion. The advantages of this world are the fruit of labour, and are seldom acquired without it; and can we think that the better blessings of the world to come are to be obtained by a few idle wishes and languid hopes? We must be active and diligent, "strive to enter in at the strait gate—work out our salvation with fear and trembling—and must by no means be weary in well-doing, or slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

Lastly, let us learn from men of the world, to lay up in store a good foundation for the time to come. Ask them, what is their end in the exercise of all that forecast, contrivance and labour, in which they are incessantly engaged; and they will tell you that it is to provide against the accidents and inconveniences of life, and to acquire something, on which they may subsist with decency and affluence when the infirmities of age come on, and they shall no longer be able to

to labour. Thus diligently do they improve the present time with a view to that which is future; and, in this, it will be our wisdom as christians to resemble them. As they labour to make a comfortable provision for the latter part of their lives, so should we endeavour to lay up a good foundation for the latter part of ours, and for those boundless scenes of eternity that must succeed them.

An increase of faith, of knowledge and patience will well reward the labour it requires: for should our passage through life be as easy and pleasant as our fondest imagination can paint, or our warmest self-love desire, these acquisitions will heighten the pleasures of such tranquil scenes, and improve our relish for them: or if it should be gloomy and afflictive, as it probably may be, they will be like a comfortable sun-shine to brighten the way, and by contributing to support us under our troubles, will carry us safely and profitably through this vale of tears.

As certainly as we are now the stewards of God, so surely must we at last be dismissed  
from



from our service and called to give in our account. As surely as we are now the inhabitants of these frail tenements of flesh and blood, so surely must we at length be dismissed from them; and we beseech you to regard it as a solemn truth, that it will require no small attainments in religion to be able to face death with a truly christian fortitude, and to triumph over this most formidable enemy of our nature. Nay even when we are best prepared to die, the idea of our final account will be always sufficiently awful, and it will be our highest wisdom to alleviate as much as possible its approach, by all the supports and means which the religion of Jesus is so well calculated to administer.

Let it not be supposed by what has been said, that we mean to stigmatize diligence and prudence in temporal concerns, as qualities alone belonging to the children of this world, or to insinuate that all who are remarkable for them come under this denomination. So far is this from the meaning of our Lord, that a proper degree of attention, prudence and diligence, with respect to temporal interests, is always recommended

ed in the Gospel; and if prudence and sagacity were approved, even though their object was condemned, much more are they praise-worthy and honourable in the exertion of honest industry, and the prosecution of our lawful concerns. The interests of another life were designed to modify our ardour for things temporal, but not to extinguish it. In vain do we pretend to be Christians, unless we be diligent and active in our proper business relating to this world, as well as in that which regards the world to come. Let us therefore in the different stations which Providence has assigned, or may allot to us, labour in the fear of God, "for the meat that perisheth;" but at the same time let us remember, that this is the least part of our work. Let us be careful to join Christian wisdom to human sagacity; and on the same principle of prudence that we exert our utmost endeavours for the support and conveniences of animal life, let us be solicitous to labour for that nobler provision which endures to life everlasting.

SER-





## S E R M O N XXIV.

*The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun. ECCLES. i. 9.*

**H**OWEVER paradoxical this maxim may seem to the young, the thoughtless and the unexperienced, there are few who have lived any time in the world, and who pretend to have at all reflected, who will not acknowledge themselves well convinced of its truth. Yet with all this conviction, how few are there even among the wisest who do not form to themselves flattering prospects of futurity, which have no foundation except in a sanguine temper and luxuriant imagination. Dissatisfied with our present condition, and disgusted with the experience of difficulties and inconveniences which we had not foreseen or expected,



we extend our views to some future period, when some change of circumstances shall enable us to attain that comfort and satisfaction which is at present beyond our reach. The child imagines that, when arrived at the period of youth, he shall enjoy pleasures far more exquisite than any that can await the state of childhood. The youth is as fully persuaded that he shall be infinitely happier when he has attained the years of manhood, is established in the world, and freed from the restraints of discipline and instruction. In maturer years the same disposition prevails. There is always a something unpossessed which renders our present blessings in some degree insipid. Ambition, wealth and pleasure hold out their several allurements; imagination seizes on some splendid object, adorns it with all its radiant colours, and connects happiness with the possession of it. Should this, when possessed, disappoint our expectations, we fix upon some other, and thus rove from one phantom to another, till Death draws a veil over all our imaginary prospects of felicity; or till, on the verge of old age, our frustrated

trated hopes compel a conviction of what the experience of others should sufficiently have taught us, that nothing in the world is completely satisfactory—that every age, every condition, has disadvantages peculiar to itself—and that one inconvenience is common to all, as all bear the same disproportion to the immensity of our desires.

In order to understand the text aright, we must carefully attend to the context, by which it will be seen that it is very different in signification, from a passage in the fifteenth verse of the third chapter, which at first sight appears to be a similar expression. It is there said, “That which hath been, is now, and that which is to be, hath already been.” In this passage the design of the preacher seems to be to rectify the error of those who are overwhelmed with terrors upon the least affliction, who are always complaining that God is more severe to them than to others, in affording them less assistance, while he submits their virtue to severer trials. In answer to these, Solomon maintains, that whatever variety may ap-



pear in the conduct of the Deity towards different persons, there is nevertheless a certain stability and uniformity which are the grand characteristics of all his proceedings. " I know that whatever God doth, it shall be for ever, nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it. And God doth it, that men should fear before him. That which hath been, is now, and that which is to be, hath already been."

But in our text, " the thing which hath been, is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun," expresses a very different sentiment. It appears from the preceding part of the chapter, that the preacher's design was to prove the unsatisfactory nature of all earthly good ; and to convince mankind that no revolution of human affairs could possibly change this character, which is indelibly stamped upon them. " What profit hath a man of all his labour, which he taketh under the sun ? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh," but the face of the world remains unaltered. " The sun also  
" ariseth,

"arise, and the sun goeth down, and  
 "hasteth to the place where he arose. The  
 "wind goeth toward the south, and turneth  
 "about unto the north; it whirleth about  
 "continually, and the wind returneth again  
 "according to all its circuits." The rivers  
 flow from their sources into the sea, yet the  
 sea is not full; for the waters of the ocean  
 are drawn up into clouds, and descending in  
 rain, supply the springs whence they first  
 arose. In this the moral world resembles  
 that of nature. In vain do we hope for some  
 vicissitude which shall render the sequel of  
 life completely happy. "All things are  
 "full of labour, man cannot utter it: the eye  
 "is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with  
 "hearing." But this ceaseless exertion of  
 all our faculties to obtain something which  
 shall fill the aching void within our hearts,  
 cannot alter the nature of things: "The  
 "thing which hath been, it is that which  
 "shall be, and that which is done, is that  
 "which shall be done, for there is no new  
 "thing under the sun."—As in our search of  
 felicity among the various objects which the  
 world presents, we have not hitherto found



any which has not left us something to desire; the experience of the past should be an earnest of the future. We have reason to pass the same judgment upon what the world may present in future life, as upon what it has already offered; and to conclude, that at the end of our days, we shall have experienced that all the temporal attainments and possessions we have acquired, are, with respect to complete happiness, as unsatisfactory as we have hitherto found them.

The error which Solomon here describes by "the eye not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing," is common to almost all mankind. Few are so well satisfied with their condition as they might and ought to be; but, overlooking their present blessings, they fix their eager views and sanguine hopes upon other situations, with which they imagine happiness more necessarily connected. Even the most temperate and philosophical minds are seldom consistent in this respect; they reason plausibly with themselves in the retirement of the closet, and are, in those moments perhaps, really superior to every inordinate desire of any thing beyond the limits

limits of their present condition. They think they have learnt in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content. But in the common intercourse of life they are thrown off their guard; the inconveniencies of their situation press hard upon them; something more splendid occurs to their mind; imagination exerts her fascinating powers; and the moral sentence, or the philosophical maxim, is uttered with a sigh, which betrays the fruitless wish and extravagant expectation of the heart.

We frequently declaim against the vanities of the world: but are not these declamations often rather the overflowings of disappointed pride, than the dictates of a soul superior to them? We love to depreciate that good, which is not within our reach; and we gratify a kind of resentment, in undervaluing what is refused to our desires. The sentiments which appear so just and philosophical, are often merely superficial—an idle flourish of words. The heart is deeply involved in error, while we vainly labour to persuade ourselves that the mist of passion is removed from our eyes, that we view the



world in a true light, and every object in its proper colours.

Of those things with which we are familiar, we easily discern the disadvantages; of those circumstances in which we are involved we feel all the inconveniencies; but of those which are the object of our wishes, we know not the disagreeable qualities, because we have not yet been sufficiently acquainted with them; or should we have tried and known them, imagination throws every blemish into the back ground of her picture, and gives so bold a relief to the opposite attractive qualities, that these alone engross the attention. Thus when sickness brings us near the verge of the grave, the continuation of life, and the restoration of health, are naturally the first wishes of the heart. This is often the case even with those who are involved in the greatest misery and distress; nay, in these sometimes the desire of life is stronger than in others. Alas! they do not reflect that, should they be restored to the world, the same dissatisfactions, the same distresses might await them, which have already drawn from their bosoms many a sigh,  
and

and suffused their eyes with many a tear. In this particular case, much may be urged to excuse this weakness; but even when the soul is at rest and calm, when the faculties are vigorous and active, we suffer imagination to obtrude objects upon us, and instead of carefully surveying them in every light, we content ourselves with beholding them only in that point of view, in which their appearance flatters our wishes the most.

From thus wilfully limiting our views proceeds that anxious concern with which we watch the vicissitudes of human events. Hence that love of change; hence those ideal phantoms of felicity, which are continually formed and cherished by the imagination.—Hence those never-ceasing schemes, those insatiable desires, which continually agitate the mind, and prey upon the heart. Hence the eye, never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing!—Deluded mortals! how long will you thus pursue unsubstantial shadows?—Not one of those vicissitudes, which you so eagerly desire, can alter that unsatisfactory nature which is common to every thing the world affords! Whatever circumstances



stances may be changed, this will ever remain the same; and after having attained all the advantages, for which you so eagerly labour, you will find yourselves as deficient and discontented as before you had acquired them.

But in order to moderate these too sanguine expectations of happiness from temporal advantages, which only serve to disturb our present tranquillity, let us remember that when our almighty Creator placed us in this world, he meant it not as our ultimate state of existence. In forming us capable of happiness he designed that we should seek it, not merely here, but above all in a more perfect dispensation, towards which the imperfection of the present ought to direct our views and our hopes. Our being destined to a future and more perfect state is therefore a bar to our hopes of complete happiness in this world, and suggests a wise reason for the unstable and imperfect nature of every thing in it. Thus whatever real happiness we can enjoy here, must arise from something that is seated in the heart, and that bears a relation to eternity, as well

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as to time. Hence, whatever revolution temporal circumstances may undergo, except in cases of absolute distress, the change can be but superficial. Some alteration may indeed take place in their appearance, but their nature is invariably the same.

But, to confirm this, look abroad into the world; and you will find that many of those splendid enjoyments, from whence you form such exquisite schemes of happiness, are mere phantoms, which at a distance appear solid and valuable, but on a nearer approach are dissipated and vanish. Like the glittering globules of quicksilver, they at once tempt, and elude the grasp. Those in the most splendid situations are, like others, liable, not only to the greater evils and afflictions of life, but also to satiety, disgust and dissatisfaction; and we often see that their weariness of expensive and artificial pleasures drives them to those, which they have in common with the rest of mankind.

A close inspection of the conditions and characters of social life, will teach you that the vast designs, the schemes of worldly honour



nour and extensive fame, which we applaud and envy in the man of power and ambition, are often the bane of his happiness. They harass his days, they disturb his nights, and leave him neither leisure nor sensibility to enjoy the few pleasures life has to bestow.

Such an examination of mankind will teach you, that even the honest peasant, who is condemned to consume his days in ceaseless labour, who at night retires to a homely cottage, and a table covered with the plainest food, may be a much happier man, than that vaunted son of victory, who, when his irresistible arms had vanquished every known part of the world, sat down and wept, because there were not other countries to subdue, other worlds to conquer.

Who could be better acquainted than Solomon with the several advantages coveted by mankind. Yet what idea does he hold forth of those which he had experienced? "This also is vanity," is the remarkable character, with which he closes every article in his survey of human happiness.

But to the experience of Solomon, let each of us add his own. Let each recal  
to

to mind the events and sentiments of past life. Can you not recollect a period, when you ardently wished for the very circumstances which Providence has since allotted you? Did you not then regard them as the summit of human happiness? Did you never fondly imagine that when these wishes were gratified, you should have nothing further to desire? Were these opinions justly founded? Do your present sentiments exactly correspond with them? Do the objects of experience confirm the suggestions of hope?

Let imagination realize every ideal scheme of happiness, which you have ever proposed to yourselves; and with all the advantages you could be supposed to acquire, you would still be as short of complete felicity, as discontented with the present, and as anxious for the future, as you are with those you actually enjoy. And you would be astonished to find a similarity so striking, between what in this respect, you had imagined so widely different.

A remarkable instance of the unsatisfactory nature of all worldly prosperity, and a  
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confirmation of Solomon's maxim, is afforded by the Emperor Septimius Severus. "Omnia fui et nihil expedit." "I have been all things, and all is of little value," was his declaration after having been raised from an humble station, to the imperial throne of Rome and the sovereignty of the world.

From what has here been asserted, think not that we mean to conclude that all conditions of life are absolutely equal with respect to the happiness they afford; that therefore they who enjoy the most valuable temporal advantages, should regard them with contempt and indifference; and that they from whom they are withheld, ought not to endeavour to acquire them, or to improve their condition and circumstances. Such a conclusion would be as contrary to the dictates of religion as to those of common sense.

Nothing, except the grossest stupidity and ingratitude, can render us insensible to temporal prosperity and to the external means of happiness, when Providence thinks fit to bestow them upon us. When our cup overflows with blessings, and we are surrounded with every thing which can render life not only

only comfortable but delightful ; shall we, because imperfection is the indelible character of every worldly advantage, give way to melancholy and sorrow, or suffer gloomy discontent to suppress and render vain every motive to gratitude and joy ? Forbid it, Reason—forbid it, Religion.

Those to whom Providence has granted a large share of the good things of life, should cultivate a sense of their real value, and survey with humble gratitude the difference which God has made between them and others, to whom these blessings are denied ; while by affability and benevolence they should endeavour to lessen the inequality. Worldly prosperity, though it cannot of itself confer solid happiness, may yet be the means of greatly increasing partial and relative bliss. Though it do not constitute that permanent good which shall follow us beyond the grave, yet it is of high value, as it tends to render our present existence comfortable and desirable.

Those from whom Providence has withheld worldly advantages, or to whom they have been but sparingly dispensed, may lawfully



fully endeavour to acquire them; may by honest industry labour to improve their condition, and to render the future path of life more pleasing than that through which they have already passed. Nay, this is an essential part of our duty—we ought not to neglect the acquisition of any good, except when it is incompatible with a greater good; nor ought we to endure any evil which we can possibly avoid, unless it be the sole means of preventing a greater evil, or of acquiring a greater good. Self-love, therefore, which within certain limits, is a lawful, because a natural passion, should teach us to exert all the efforts of honest industry for the acquisition of temporal prosperity, and of whatever may improve the happiness of our lives.

The love of our neighbour also, which we are commanded to regulate by the love of ourselves, is another motive to engage us to this duty, and should prompt us to avail ourselves of every innocent method of acquiring worldly prosperity. The more we are blessed with wealth, the better are we able to relieve the indigent: the more we are

are elevated in rank, the better are we able to succour the oppressed: the more learning and knowledge we have acquired, the better are we qualified to inculcate the duties of religion—to display the beauties and advantages of virtue.

From this view of the futility of our expectations of complete happiness in this world, we should learn to bear with patience the inconveniencies of our present condition, which no alteration of circumstances here can entirely remove. Many render themselves insensible to present advantages from the desire of greater. The eager anxiety with which they long after new acquisitions, prevents them from enjoying what they actually possess. Their intense desire of rising to a more elevated station of life, disqualifies them from relishing the sweets of that which is allotted to them.

But from the view here exhibited of the vanity of every earthly wish, you may learn the folly of overlooking present happiness, in the idle hope that some future period of life will afford you more complete satisfaction; thus bartering the enjoyment of actual



good, for the empty shadow of vain expectation.

Hence also permit me to exhort you to fix your views and hopes on the felicity of another and better state, and to seek that good from eternity which you cannot reap from time. For what complete happiness can you expect from this life, if the future is to resemble the past—if, in the years that remain, you are to experience the same disappointments, the same mixture of evil with its boasted good, which you have so often weighed in the balance and found wanting.

To conclude, as year after year passes away, and experience convinces us more and more of the imperfection of all earthly felicity; let this remind us that this world is only a state of trial and preparation for a better. Hence let us cultivate resignation and gratitude to that God, who has set before us the prospect of more perfect happiness; who, by the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ has begotten us again to a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens. Of this let us

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endeavour to render ourselves less unworthy, by setting our affections more and more on things above. Amidst all the disappointments and sorrows, which await us in the cloudy and uncertain scene of this life, let us console ourselves with the expectation of a brighter and more glorious state, where no fallacious hope shall ensnare, no smiling appearances shall betray, no insidious joy shall sting; but happiness perfect in its kind shall be the reward and companion of virtue; where we shall be continually improving in the latter, and increasing the former, through the infinite ages of eternal duration.





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12 JY 62

